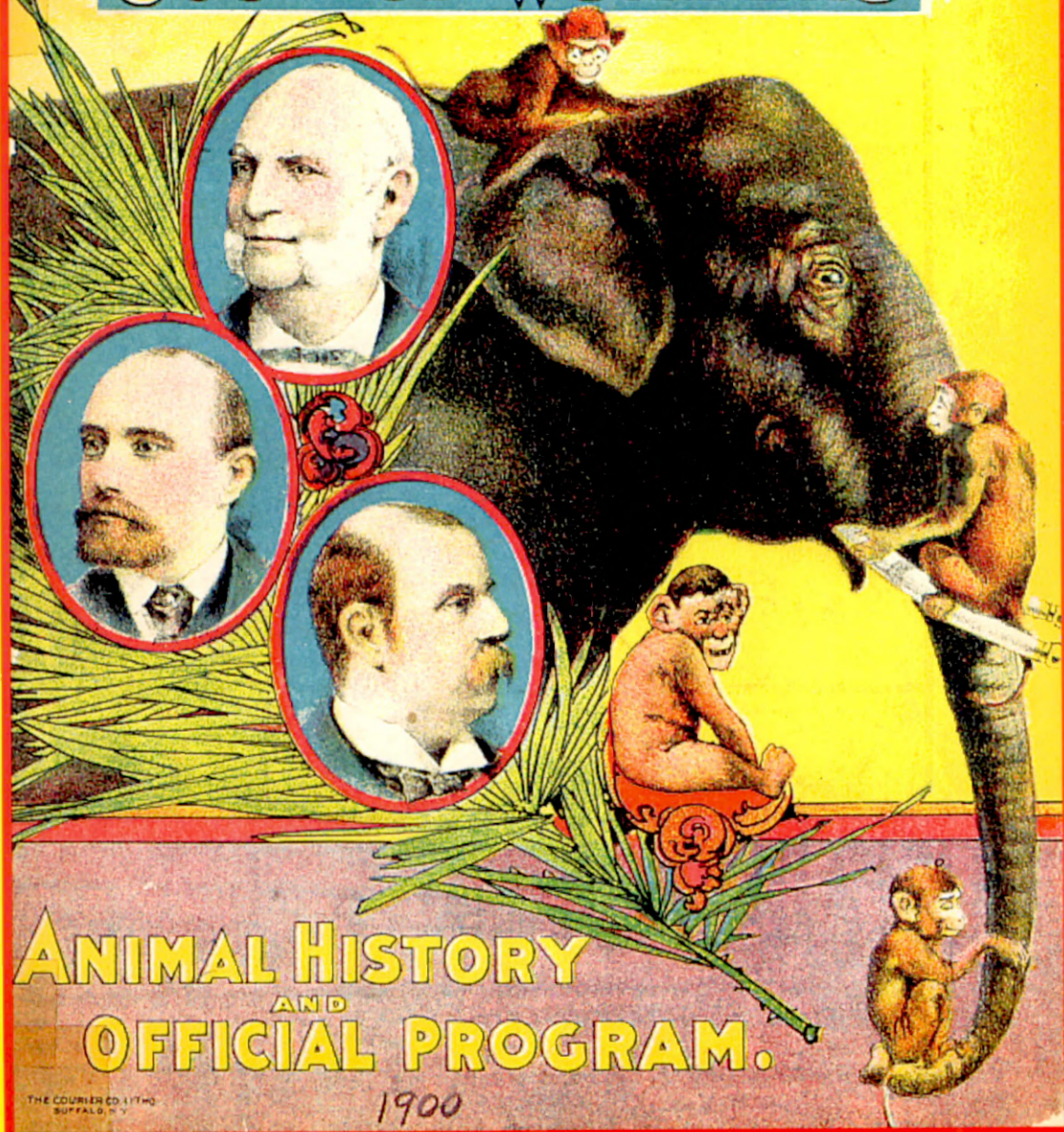


BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

JULY-AUGUST 2000

THE ADAM FOREPAUGH & SELLS BROTHERS, BOOK OF WONDERS



BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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JULY-AUGUST 2000

FRED D. PFENING, JR. EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor
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THE FRONT COVER

The 1900 Adam Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Circus program was printed by the Courier Company of Buffalo, New York.

It was owned by Lewis Sells, Peter Sells, James A. Bailey and W. W. Cole.

The season opened on April 4 with a sixteen day stand in Madison Square Garden, filling the usual Barnum & Bailey date while that circus was in Europe. The under canvas tour began in Baltimore, Maryland on April 23. The performance was presented in three rings and two stages. It included lady riders Clair St. Clair, Emma Stickney and Linda Jeal. Jockey riders were Oscar Lowande, Sam Bennett, Fred Ledgett and Marthino Lowende, Jr. Others were the Aurora Zouaves; the five St. Leons, and five DeLucas, acrobats; Frank Melville, William Gorman, liberty horses; and Diavolo, loop-the-loop on a bicycle. Frank Melville was equestrian director; W. H. Dockrill, assistant equestrian director; William N. Merrick was bandmaster and Bill Emery was elephant superintendent.

THE BACK COVER

The 1920 Rhoda Royal Circus used this courier. This is the back cover. It was printed by the Erie Lithograph Company.

NEW MEMBERS

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MAILING PROBLEMS

The Secretary-Treasurer and the Editor are well aware of the massive problems with the Circus Historical Society mailing list. Our former mailing service created the problems, not the officers.

The problems were discovered when our new mailing service, using the information from the former one, mailed the dues and subscription notices.

Notices were mailed to former members and subscribers in error.

A number of our active members and subscribers were left off the list and did not receive renewal notices.

Many of those not receiving notices have written asking about their renewals. Each of these inquiries has been answered by the Secretary-Treasurer, explaining the problems.

A reminder post card was sent to all members and subscribers who had not yet paid this year. The reminder cards explained the problems, and asked for their understanding.

This is the first time in our history that we have suffered such a mix-up. The officers apologize for this mess and have made every effort to completely get our mailing list back in proper order.

We appreciate your patience.

BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

1966-Jan.-Feb.

1967-July-Aug., Nov.-Dec.

1968-All but Jan.-Feb.

1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.

1970-All but July-Aug.,

Sept.-Oct.

1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.

1972-All available.

1973-All but Nov.-Dec.

1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.

1975-All available.

1976-All but Jan.-Feb.,

Nov.-Dec.

1977-All but Mar.-Ap.

1978-All available.

1979-All but Jan.-Feb.

1980-1986-All available.

1987-All but Nov.-Dec.

1988-2000-All available.

Price is \$4.00 each. Add \$2.00 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES
2515 DORSET RD.
COLUMBUS, OH 43221

CIRCUS LANGUAGE

A Glossary of Circus Terms

compiled by
A. H. Saxon

36-page pamphlet with color wrapper depicting Alfred Court and "Unus." A concise yet comprehensive list, including both current and historical terms, of special value to those coming to the circus for the first time but useful to veteran historians and writers as well. By the author and editor of the award-winning *P. T. Barnum The Legend and the Man; The Life and Art of Andrew Ducrow & The Romantic Age of the English Circus; Enter Foot and Horse; Barnumiana; The Autobiography of Mr. & Tom Thumb; Selected Letters of P. T. Barnum, &c.*, who is himself well-known for his trenchant observations on the circus. Readers of the present work will not be disappointed. \$7, including first-class postage. Volume discount available for orders of 10 or more copies.

Make checks payable to and order directly from the publisher: Jumbos Press, 166 Orchard Hill Drive, Fairfield, CT 06430. For a list of other works available from Jumbo's Press, send self-addressed stamped envelope. (Owners of *Barnumiana* whose names and addresses are on file with the press will be notified when the "First Supplement" to that work is published around the end of this year.)

ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN CIRCUS, 1793-1860

Long out of print, this three volume history has been re-issued in a single 650 page book that sells, postpaid, for \$55.00. This is a 8 1/2 x 11 paperback, fully illustrated, and brought up to date (Volume I was re-printed in 1993, but volume II hasn't been seen since 1986). This is a very limited edition, and I'm a very old man, so this is probably the last time around. "Come a runnin, but don't fall dawn, we'll hold the baby while you eat."

Available from the author:

Stuart Thayer
430 17th Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98112

Early Esquestrians of the Ringling Bros. Circus

Rhoda Royal

By John Daniel Draper

Born in Washington, D. C., Rhoda Royal at the age of 21 was employed in the stable department of the Barnum & London Shows as one of six two-horse teamsters. He was destined to become a premier circus horse trainer and the "purveyor of startling performance effects with the aid of beautiful horses." Eventually he was a circus proprietor and the owner of large numbers of ring stock that he placed, sometimes simultaneously, on several large circuses such as Barnum & Bailey, Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace and Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

In 1889 he was superintendent of ring stock on the Adam Forepaugh Circus. Going to the Ringling Bros. Circus, he drove a Roman chariot in races with William DeMott and was also ring stock superintendent in 1891. He held these positions through the 1898 season. One of the 32 ring stock men that he supervised in 1897 was seventeen year old John Agee. Agee's wages that year were \$3.50 per week and Royal received \$460 for the season. During the 1890s Royal was also parade inspector, manege rider and four horse chariot driver in the hippodrome races.

A fair appraisal of his duties and work is given in the Ringling route book for 1893: "Mr. Rhoda Royal is the efficient and energetic superintendent of the ring stock, trick horses, ponies, equine curios, etc., and the superb condition of the horses under his charge is largely due to the untiring ability he displays in this department. Upon Mr. Royal depends largely the getting ready of the parade and the overseeing and equipping of the horses for the rings

and hippodrome races, etc. He has held this present important position with the show for the past three years, previous to which he held a similar place with the Adam Forepaugh Show. Mr. Royal is an important actor in the handling of the show and is equally competent in cases of emergency for handling trick horses in the ring, participating in the races, riding, manege acts, etc. His affability and courteous treatment of all who come in contact with him makes him a general favorite all around."

Rhoda Royal as pictured in the 1893 Ringling Bros. Circus route book. Pfening Archives.



As reported by Baraboo, Wisconsin's *Sauk County Democrat* for April 28, 1892, Rhoda Royal and Deliah Noyes were married at the home of the bride. Nine years later on November 26, 1903 the same newspaper noted that "Mr. & Mrs. Rhoda Royal have gone to housekeeping in the eastern part of the city." In the meanwhile Deliah had become a proficient high school circus rider.

Walter L. Main, in private correspondence, stated that Rhoda Royal, having broken some high school horses of his own, joined the Walter L. Main Circus during the 1899 season. Soon after, he took charge of all of the horses on the show when the boss hostler left. At the end of the season the show was sold at auction. Rhoda Royal, Joe Berris and I. V. Strebbig leased the rail cars that were not sold by Main. With this equipment the three of took out the Great Rhoda Royal Australian Railroad Shows on nine cars for a successful 1900 tour while Main vacationed in Europe for the summer.

The Rhoda Royal Circus appeared under canvas, featuring Rhoda and Madame Royal in a "double fashionable" manege act and Madame Royal with her tandem cake walking thoroughbreds. Joe Berris was equestrian director as well as presenter of his 63 horse act and a school of ten trained ponies. Albert and Ray Thompson were rough riders and did burlesque riding on mules. Capt. W. C. Sharp had his detachment of Roosevelt

Rough Riders. There was also a variety of ground and aerial acts as well as jockey and Roman riders. Lady riders on the hippodrome track were Marie Marston, Flora Mayhue and Birdie Franklin.

During the winter of 1900-1901 Royal and Berris reduced the show to three or four railroad cars and continued to tour until it financially failed in Florida in March of 1901.

From 1902 through 1906, Royal toured again with Ringling Bros. Circus. In 1902 he shared the duties of ringmaster with Edward Shipp, George Wood, John Carroll, John Rooney and George Cole. Albert Ringling was the equestrian director. Display #7 featured saddle horses in high school riding. In Ring One were John Carroll and Miss Georgie Cole; in Ring Two were John O'Brien, Michael Rooney, Etta Jordan and Ida Miaco and in Ring Three were Rhoda and Madam Royal in a superb double high school equestrian display, featuring two perfectly trained manege horses. For their work from May 13 to November 15, 1902 the Royals collected a total of \$2848.50.

By the 1903 season Royal had advanced to the position of assistant equestrian director under the leadership of Albert Ringling who continued as equestrian director. Royal held this position through the 1906 season. In the 1903 season display #6 was an "International Exhibition of Famous Saddle Horses." In Ring One was an "Exposition of Haute Ecole" with Etta Jordan and John Rooney. In the Center Ring was a "peerless exhibition of special horse accomplishments with four distinguished prize winners appearing in one ring ridden by famous masters and mistresses of the saddle: Mr. and Mrs. Rhoda Royal, Mr. Michael Rooney and Miss Ida Miaco." In Ring Three Miss Savoy and John Agee rode superb manege horses.

Display #10 was entitled "Ringling Bros.' Great Creation, wonderfully successful, original arenic feature." It consisted of "61 beautiful specimens of the perfect horse, gaily caparisoned with costly trappings, obedient to the trainer's call, moving in harmony in most complicated, intricate and difficult maneuvers, performed by Rhoda Royal."



Royal on Ringling Bros. in 1897. Pfening Archives.

John Agee, in addition to his high school riding, already mentioned, made the following presentations: in Ring Two of Display #5 he showed the wonderful acting pony, Dandy, and in the hippodrome races he rode the horse, Napoleon, against the pony, Spider, ridden by Master Philip St. Leon.

In 1904 in Display #7 Royal introduced in the center ring Silver King, the perfect horse, in an exhibition of equine intelligence. Agee served as ringmaster with Alex Lowande in the riding act of May Davenport and Reno McCree. He also presented a troupe of Shetland ponies and rode in a high school act with his wife. That year there was a total of seven in the haute école display, including such riders as Miss L. Bedini, Nellie Showers and John Rooney. In the hippodrome races Agee again rode Napoleon opposite the rider on the pony Spider and John Foley drove a racing four horse Roman chariot in opposition to John Slater.

Ringling Bros. had a full page of photographs in the November 25 *Billboard* of its "premier artists and undisputed arenic champions" from the 1905 season. Among others were Royal, "the prince of trainers and equestrian director," and Agee who actually rode in a high school act in Display #7 with Nola Satterfield, Miss G. Eldred and John Foley. Foley and John Pendergast were ringmas-

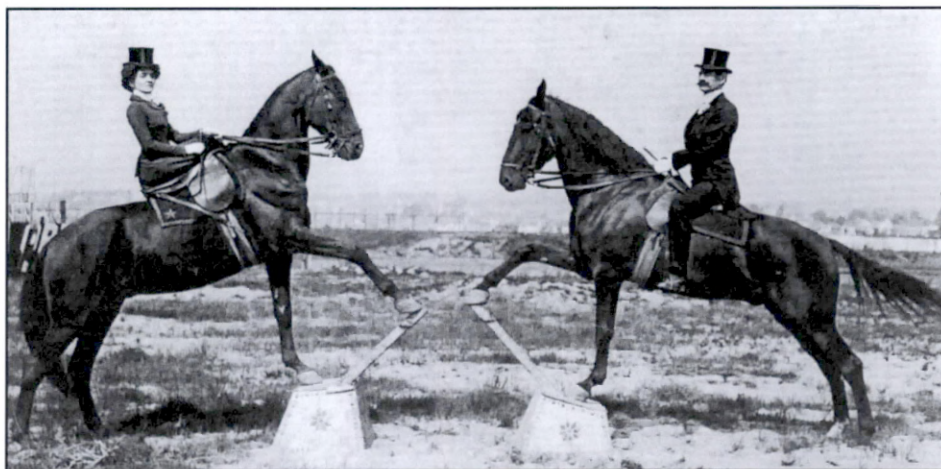
ters for the double jockey act of May Davenport and Reno McCree. Foley also rode in the gentleman's jockey race.

Pertinent portions of the Ringling program for 1906 included Royal with a quintet of thoroughbreds, a star feature, and these horses were in wonderful form. He and Madame Bedini also appeared in Display #7, and Royal and his wife then exhibited their horses on the hippodrome track, showing all gaits in harness, followed by Mr. Royal's performance, riding Black Beauty. Royal's and his wife's salaries for the season totaled \$2917.

His wife closed the season in mid June. A 1906 handbill featured Deliah and her world famous high school horse Glendive being driven to a spectacular floral cart.

Although Royal was with Ringling Bros. in 1906, in the same year he also furnished a group of 20 accomplished knights and ladies of the saddle, with their mounts, participating in the picturesque, pleasing and colorful "Gathering of the Garlands" for the Carl Hagenbeck Circus. In "intricate and stately maneuvers" the riders displayed "perfect and pompous poise and their beautiful black chargers" demonstrated "to the highest degree the possibilities of the animal-trainer's art." There was also a presentation of the "Charge of the Royal Black Horse Hussars."

Appearing on Ringling Bros. through July 10, 1906 was a \$9 a



week ballet girl, Carrie Norenberg, mentioned here because she was the future Mrs. Rhoda Royal. In mid season she went to the Carl Hagenbeck show where she rode high school opposite Ida Miaco and also appeared as one or nineteen ballet girls.

By 1907 Royal was recognized as the producer of the most novel horse acts known to the public. In the late summer he was negotiating with the Western Vaudeville Manager's Association to book his pure white Arabian, Chesterfield, the statuary and contortion horse, for the winter season, following the close of Hagenbeck Wallace where John Fuller had worked this horse during the 1907 tenting season. The horse walked on his hind feet as "easily as a gamin of the ghetto stands on his head." Against a full black setting Chesterfield, hitched to a cart with electric bulbs, was driven around the stage in a figure eight. While hitched to the cart he would move sideways, lay down, sit up, dance with his front feet and do the Hoochie Coochie. Dogs walked among the horse's feet and through the wheels of the moving cart. In the statue and contortion acts he extended his front leg out straight, placed a front leg over his head, laid on his back with legs extended into the air and did the wounded in battle and dying horse dramatic scenes.

That year with Hagenbeck Wallace there was also the charge of the Royal Black Huzzars by the Rhoda Royal group of gentleman riders arrayed in continental uniforms. The eight horses and their riders participated in drills and fancy evo-

Mr. and Mrs. Royal on Ringling in 1897. Pfening Archives.

lutions, including the lay down and sit up entry and finishing with fancy floral garlands. The twenty head of thoroughbreds on the show gained for Royal the sobriquet of America's greatest horseman. In Display #11 the Rhoda Royal high school horses with twelve riders were in two rings, on stage two and on the hippodrome track. The manege riders under his direction included John Fuller, Grace Jenks, Austin King, Mary Connors, Anita Faber, Carrie Norenberg, Ida Miaco, Kirk Chambers, Joe Litchel and Miss Savoy.

Royal was also the general director of the Rhoda Royal Indoor Circus that went out that fall and winter. It was a high class organization showing under the auspices of fraternal societies. Its program and artists stamped it as a great undertaking. The itinerary took it to the principal cities of America. It opened in Louisville, Kentucky on November 25, 1907 in the Horse Show Building. In February 1908 it played Shrine dates in both Minneapolis and St. Paul. There were sixteen displays and twelve races on the program. The riding numbers included the Stickneys and the Reno McCree-Lulu Davenport Troupe; John Agee, champion trick saddle rider and greatest rough rider in the country; Carrie Norenberg; Sarah Agee with her pony floral cart; the Clarkes; William Marks; Aldine Potter and Kirkland Chambers. Three aerial acts were included; the Delno Troupe, Van Diemans and the Five Flying Nelsons.

Rhoda Royal did not initiate winter circus productions, but he was probably the first to tour a completely integrated circus company during the cold season. He realized that in the winter many circus performers remained idle because their acts were too big to produce on the vaudeville stage. He knew he could secure these acts and bring together the greatest aggregation of circus performers ever presented under canvas or indoors.

The St. Paul Osman Shrine Show for 1908 was a classic production. In addition to the equestrian novelty, "Gathering of the Garlands," a beautiful May-pole on horseback, there was the Game of Rose with the four riders, John Agee, Harry Earl, Eugene Buck and Kirk Chambers, representing America, Great Britain, France and Germany. In this game the rose could be taken only from the "off" or right hand side and the rider holding his rose longest was declared the victor.

The McCree-Davenport Troupe with the canine Schepp offered a triple bounding bareback jockey exhibition. Rhoda Royal's quadruple high school display with four manege horses was worked by Henry Potter on St. Louis, John Agee on Bathhouse John, Ida Adelaide on New York, and Carrie Norenberg on Washington. A four horse liberty and trick act with beautiful black thoroughbreds was presented by Royal. The equines formed pyramids and they laid down and sat up, all movements directed with patience, kindness and intelligent effort. Royal had taken months to attain this perfection.

For the 1908-1909 season engagements were played at the St. Louis Coliseum, St. Paul Auditorium (Osman Shrine) and Peoria, Illinois Coliseum (Mohamed Shrine), among others. At St. Louis the show was held over for an extra week during the holidays by consent of all the performers so they could give a free Christmas Day show in the Coliseum for the poor children of the city. The performers had remained away from their own homes in order to please

these children. It turned out to be the "most sparkling and dashing of any previous effort made by the performers."

By now the name of Rhoda Royal stood out among those in any hall of circus fame. He was considered to be a premier stage director of the circus world and a leader among horse trainers. He was one of the few who was a real asset to those contemplating the organization of a mammoth tented enterprise. When John W. "Bet a Million" Gates, the great early 20th century financier, considered entering the circus field, it was Royal on whom the project depended. Many came to believe that there would have been another large show on the road for the 1909 season if Royal had been willing to lend his name and his ability to a new enterprise.

In the winter of 1909-1910 dates were filled at the Memphis Auditorium (Al Chymia Temple), New Orleans under canvas at Canal and White (Jerusalem Temple), Birmingham, Chattanooga Hippodrome (Alhambra Temple), St. Louis Coliseum (Moolah Temple), Atlanta Taft Hall, Buffalo Broadway Arsenal, Milwaukee (Tripoli Temple), Kansas City Convention Hall (Ararat Temple). New acts that season included the Ty Bell-Julian Sisters, the Brachards (contortionists), Bartiks (Russian whirlwind dancers), the Duttons and the Carrolls.

Other new features of the Rhoda Royal 2 Ring Circus, Hippodrome and Wild West, as it appeared in Atlanta, were the grand free torch light street parade and Omar the airship horse. Each performance concluded with the Oklahoma Bill Wild West Exhibition. Special mention should be made to the musical horses, equipped with differently toned bell chimes attached to their feet. On cue they furnished a "musical" accompaniment to Eva Bartik's beautiful solo which she rendered while seated astride a white horse. On the hippodrome track the horse Nellie R. was presented by Carrie Norenberg. It performed new and novel tricks while hitched to an English stanhope. There was a

reported total of 100 performers, 300 horses and 40 clowns on the show.

This show was a big operation. It came to each city on a special train. The floor of the indoor performing arena was covered with earth and over that was strewn a thick layer of sawdust, completely resembling a regular summer tent interior. Popcorn, peanut and lemonade butchers passed among the spectators at each performance. There was a grand concert of acts on the center stage immediately on the conclusion of the main show. Only the palm leaf fan man was absent.

In the wild west after show there were cowboys and cowgirls with broncho busting and the usual chase for the horse thief. John Agee did his thrilling rough riding act, hanging head first from the saddle as he did pickups from the ground while racing at full speed.

In January of 1911 Royal and Adams presented the "World's Greatest Indoor Circus, Hippodrome and Wild West with the Most Bewildering Array of Arenic Talent Ever Assembled." This was the only year that Mr. Adams was listed as being associated with the operation. Among the features were Royal's "Famous Educated Horses," 40 blue ribbon thoroughbreds.

Royal and Adams newspaper ad used in 1911. Pfening Archives.

The year 1912 was another big one for Rhoda Royal's 2 Ring Circus. The arena director was John R. Agee and his assistant was John Carroll. The ringmasters were Fred Collier, John Carroll and Alex Seabert. There were 25 displays including the Grand Hippodrome Races which offered seven grand events: cowboy and cowgirl races, steeplechase, international race, Roman standing race, riderless race and tiny elephant Muggins versus pony race.

Some of the newly appearing riders were Maud Burbank, John and Flo Fuller, Lucille King, Nellie Carroll and Marie Elser. Some of the horses were also quite famous, namely Dolly Varden ridden by Aldene Potter and Bath House John, ridden by John Agee. Deliah Royal rode Snow Queen, the bridleless high school Arabian. Aerialists included Cordona, the Mexican wonder on the flying trapeze with toe and heel catches while in space at dizzy heights, and Irene Montgomery on swinging ladders. Others were Orrin Davenport in his horse to horse back somersault and M'ile Cordona, queen of the slack wire with graceful postures, great muscular control and artistic bending.

In a western battle scene, ranchmen fought the rustlers. Clowns were in much evidence with an offer of \$100 per minute for anyone who stayed on the revolving table and

ARMORY To-morrow Night and All Week - Matinees Daily

Nov. 28 TO Dec. 3

ROYAL AND ADAMS
PRESENT THE WORLD'S
GREATEST INDOOR CIRCUS
HIPPODROME WILD WEST
MOST BEWILDERING ARRAY
OF ARENIC TALENT EVER
ASSEMBLED

75 Big Circus Acts—All the Thrills and Exhilarations of the "White"

rode the mules. There were Slivers Sirget and Maud He-Haw, grotesque skating on the stage, John Fuller in a comedy riding act, mishaps of the taxicab on the track and Snowball, the donkey clown with Ab Johnson, Eddie Nemo and Jack Harris. Maude Rollins, the western cowgirl, rode Omar the airship horse as it ascended to the arena's dome amid fireworks.

The finale came when Mrs. Rhoda Royal rode the ballroom horse Rinaldo, purchased from John Carroll. This horse was publicized as the only two stepping horse in the world. His training had put Rhoda Royal at the very top of the list of horse trainers. The audience was advised to "watch Rinaldo's feet, hind and fore, change every step and keep perfect time to the lilting music of the band."

During one week in March of 1912, Rhoda Royal set up a two ring circus on Champa Street in Denver between 14th and 17th Streets. John Agee on Bath House John, Mrs. Rhoda Royal, and a score of equally famous equestrians were seen there twice daily in a great free entertainment.

In addition to the above activities, in the period from 1908 through 1917, Rhoda Royal served as the equestrian director on Sells-Floto each year except for 1910 when he was on Buffalo Bill's & Pawnee Bill's Wild West. For a number of these years he had saddle horses on other circuses in addition to Sells-Floto. In fact, at one time he was credited with owning more manege and high school stock than any other individual.

The reason that Rhoda Royal was originally signed on Sells-Floto is of interest. In November of 1907 it was reported that Otto Floto tried to get John Philip Sousa to come with the show for the 1908 season to add prestige to the fledgling organization. Sousa did not accept the invitation. However, Harry Tammen, the owner, did increase the prestige of his show by signing Rhoda Royal and his 39 trained horses and some camels. Royal was probably the most skilled and best known high school horse trainer of the time. Twenty of his

RHODA ROYAL



RHODA ROYAL
Solo Director

Two Ring CIRCUS

HIPPODROME
Old Bufalo
Wild West

THE ONLY WINTER TRAVELING CIRCUS
ORGANIZATION IN THE WORLD.

CONVENTIONAL HALL

KANSAS CITY, MO.

DAILY MATINEES 2 P. M.—NIGHTS 8 P. M.

ONE WEEK COMMENCING
Monday, Jan. 8th.

Program cover of the 1912 Royal indoor indoor Circus. Pfening Archives.

horses were used in a feature manege act.

In 1909 the Denver Shrine Circus was part and parcel with the Sells-Floto opening on March 29th in the 6300 seat Denver Amphitheater. The sixteen Black Horse Hussars did fancy maneuvers in the Gathering of the Garlands and Threading of the Needle. A troupe of ten high school riders included Carrie Norenberg, John and Nellie Carroll, Clara Ruel and Tilly Bartik.

It was announced early in the spring of 1910 that Rhoda Royal with his sixteen blue ribbon thoroughbred high school horses, every one a star in some particular line, would be on Buffalo Bill's Wild West & Pawnee Bill's Far East along with Ray Thompson and his wife with their ten blooded animals and the world famed Joe Bailey. As it turned out these two excelsior troupes together achieved the limit of possibilities of graceful horsemanship. Some of the sixteen high school riders were Ray and Mrs. Thompson, Lillian

Compton, John and Mrs. Fuller, Flo Robinson, and Austin and Lucille King. Johnny Baker was the arena director for the show.

Returning to Sells-Floto in 1911, Royal resumed his former duties as equestrian director and had his company of horses there. Some of his star riders included John Carroll and wife, and Lizzie Rooney. Madam Royal, William Barrett and John Carroll had animal acts.

The next year the Rhoda Royal Troupe on the hippodrome track featured eleven magnificent manege horses. The riders included Mrs. Rhoda Royal, Marie Elser, Ida Miaco, John and Flo Fuller, Maud Burbank, Irene Montgomery, Fred Collier, Emma Stickney and Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Lowande. In addition, the skill and beauty of sixteen horses and riders were demonstrated in the Gathering of the Garlands.

In 1913 Rhoda Royal continued on Sells Floto with his ten manege horses featuring Maud Burbank, Leo Hamilton, Irene Montgomery and Flo Fuller, Omar, the horse with wings, and Mrs. Rhoda Royal on the track riding the bridleless two step horse Rinaldo. Royal's new Mephisto riding number was very attractive and created a sensation everywhere.

That same year he had two turkey trot horses on Barnum and Bailey in display #16. Both were good. Also, his prize winning white statue horses were in a number of beautiful poses that elicited many "Ah's" from the spectators. In addition, tiny Muggins, Royal's midget elephant, and his mixed animal act were on Young Buffalo's Wild West.

During his circus career Rhoda Royal, in addition to his horses, at one time or another owned nine elephants, eight of which were Billy Sunday, Victor, Helen, Muggins, Tiny May, Carrie, Chin Chin and Rhoda. Although Royal had not appeared on Ringling Bros. Circus since 1906, he corresponded in the fall of 1913 with Al Ringling which indicated that a friendly relationship still existed between them. In a letter dated October 30, 1913. Royal wrote:

"Would like to arrange for this coming season to furnish two or three statue horses as I hear that you are going to put on a Big Statue number. I can furnish people to work them or would furnish man to break your people to work them, or would furnish horses and man; you furnish tables and all wardrobe. These are fine looking horses. I think I can furnish them cheaper than you can have them broke. Or, if you would not care to arrange for the horses, I would help you in regards to size of tables, or any other information if you wish it. The horses go back with Barnum and Bailey next season. They tell me that they gave good satisfaction.

"I will stay here in St. Louis all winter as I have a very nice place to work stock." In a second letter, sent from Talbot's Hippodrome in Kansas City on November 23, 1913, Royal sent details for the mechanism of a revolving table.

On November 28, 1913 Al Ringling thanked Royal for the plan of the revolving platform, hood, etc. "By your letter I note that you figure on coming to Baraboo in the near future. When you do come be sure and stop with me at my home. Now don't go to any hotel. We will be pleased to have you come and stop with us and I will be glad to talk a little old time stuff over with you. From what I understand you have been doing very nicely in the past number of years. This of course pleases me very much and I hope and believe you will continue to meet with success."

In 1914 Ringling Bros. Circus did have two equine statuary acts in display #10. One was presented by Mr. and Mrs. La Rue and the other, with English setters in a hunting scene, by F. J. Brady and Mamie Woodford. No information has been found to indicate whether either of these acts involved any of the Royal horses.

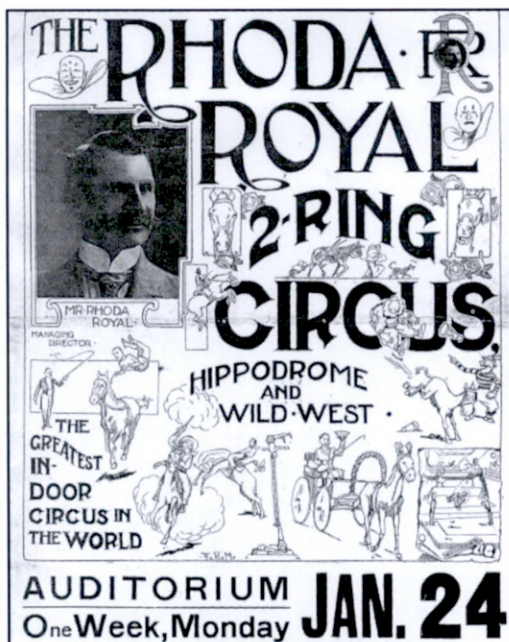
In the spring of 1914 Royal was busy at addresses in three cities—Chicago, Kansas City and St. Louis.



Poster used to advertise Omar the Airship Horse in 1912. Pfening Archives.

He was developing a twelve act show including 30 horses and ponies, elephants and dogs, which he billed as Rhoda Royal's Circus, Royal

Front page of a courier used in 1912 by Rhoda Royal. Pfening Archives.



Hippodrome and Vaudeville. The big indoor ensemble opened a six week tour in Waterloo, Iowa the week of January 26th. It then went to Cedar Rapids, followed by Davenport. Mrs. Rhoda Royal with her statue horse, Bismarck, was one of the biggest hits with the show. Herman Joseph, famous Hebrew clown with Barnum and Bailey, deserted the vaudeville ranks for these six weeks to go with Royal. When the tour concluded, he rejoined Barnum & Bailey.

Rhoda Royal in February also had vaudeville acts on the Pantages circuit in Vancouver, British Columbia.

During the regular 1914 Sells-Floto season Royal was assisted in his equestrian director responsibilities by Robert D. Stickney. Karl King was the bandleader. The program featured Buffalo Bill and his Congress of Rough Riders of the World and 24 Rhoda Royal horses with both lady and gentlemen riders in the May Pole Dance on Horseback. Also appearing was the elephant Muggins, assisted by a dog and pony and the Rhoda Royal Troupe of manege and dancing horses. Flo Robinson, "the English equestrienne," rode Omar, the original airship horse, to the top of the tent.

Display #15 was "the Tango's the thing, and upon the Hippodrome track is shown the Famous Rhoda Royal troupe of manege and dancing horses, in connection with the widely known prize-winner of the Sells-Floto Circus, a number presenting a gathering of riders as well as horses distinctive and notable, peerless in their value and their skill. In the group there appear 26 unapproachable manege horses. Not only are the usual high school and manege acts performed, but every step known in the newer schools of dancing are here shown, performed by graceful, pirouetting equines. The Tango, with its dips, its glides and its quick changes, the one step—so popular every-

where through the U. S. — the hesitation waltz, and the latest craze of the ballroom, the Betticourt, are all shown before you by these wonderful horses and shown perfectly, thereby presenting an act in itself worth far more than the price of admission."

Royal was also producer of the concert which featured a sword combat, song and dance number, high jumping horses with Irene Montgomery, Lucille King and Viola Donovan, bucking horses, unrideable mules, roping and auto polo.

In 1915 display #15 on Sells Floto was practically identical to that for the preceding year. Among the eleven high school horse riders in display #11 was Carrie Royal, the former Carrie Norenberg. This was the first official mention of Carrie as Royal's new wife. His assistant equestrian director for this year was Austin King. By now Royal was known as the largest individual animal owner of horses, mules, camels, elephants, etc. He had recently originated the posing act done by beautiful white horses, the most pretentious thing in years. It was to be seen in vaudeville the coming season.

In November, Fred Collier on Rhoda Royal's high school horse President Wilson and Essie Fay on Arabia led the Society Horse Show parade during the engagement of the Wortham Shows at Dickinson, North Dakota. Further, Victor and Helen, two of the Rhoda Royal elephants, were on the ten car Hugo Bros. Circus for the 1915 season. That year Royal bought two small elephants from W. P. Hall to use in vaudeville acts.

Royal in 1916 was assisted in his equestrian director duties on Sells-Floto by Alden Potter. To display #15 of the previous year was added the champion horse of all, Jumping Jupiter. "An automobile faces him filled with people. One look, a leap



MERRY CHRISTMAS

MISS DOLLY CASTLE

PRESENTING

RHODA ROYAL ELEPHANTS

HAPPY NEW YEAR

FEATURE ATTRACTION FOR FAIRS—NOW PLAYING VAUDEVILLE

Royal ran this ad in the November 16, 1916 *Billboard*. Pfening Archives.

and Jumping Jupiter, the champion auto hurdling horse of the world, has cleared the obstacle and is trotting down the hippodrome track while you—well, you'll cheer him and applaud him. You can't help it"

Carrie Royal appeared in several acts: the elephants Muggins and Billy Sunday with dogs and monkeys, a center stage act of dogs, ponies and monkeys, as one of 13 riders of the Royal manege horses on the track and as a performer with Lucia Zora and Arline Palmer in the big elephant act.

The Royal statue horses were presented by Virginia Lamar. Jack Harris, the elk tooth policeman, performed with Royal's unrideable mules.

In October Royal's elephants appeared at the Peoria, Illinois National Implement Vehicle Show. Simultaneously on the 20 car Coop & Lent Circus were Rhoda Royal's posing horses with the Six Waltons, as well as a manege act with his high school horses, his four horse act with Freddy Collier as rider and a school of performing horses and midget elephants.

For the second half of the year Dolly Castle presented two small Royal elephants at fairs, in vaudeville at the Victoria Theatre in Chicago and in a six act circus at the

Boston Store in that city. In December, Royal was spending much of his time in New York City in search of novelties and innovations for his 1917 circus season.

Aside from the Rhoda Royal troupe of 26 thoroughbreds, the most outstanding feature on Sells-Floto in 1917 was Herberta (Herbert) Beeson, the "Eltinge of the wire," so named after the famous cross dressing

vaudevillian Julian Eltinge. Carrie Royal presented the comical elephant Muggins. Then there was Omar: "There have been Zeppelins and Zeppelins, but never a Zeppelin like Rhoda Royal, the famous circus impresario, now brings before you in the beautiful mottled Arabian steed, 'Omar,' the Zeppelin horse. With fire-bombs and grenades bursting and splurging about him, with the sparks flying and the flames caressing with their fiery fingers, he ascends to the topmost pinnacle of the great tent, Miss Ola Darragh rampant in the lurid field of fire, and there remains a statue of immovable rigidity in an inferno of flame."

Royal had high school horses as well as the young elephant Carrie on Jess Willard and Buffalo Bill Circus in 1917.

In December 1917 it was announced in *Billboard* that "Rhoda Royal will not be with Sells-Floto next season." He went to the Toledo, Ohio quarters to close a contract with Frank P. Spellman, president of the U. S. Circus Corporation, whereby all of Royal's horses, elephants and other attractions would be with the new motorized circus. This circus did not work out as planned, not opening until 1919 and then closing after three days.

That season great publicity was given to the "World Famed" collection of animals belonging to Rhoda Royal, "owner of the best trained elephant acts in the world, most beauti-

ful and picturesque statue posing groups of horses, high school and manege acts trained to the highest standards, superb horses and gorgeous costumes for circus and vaudeville."

In the late winter of 1918 Royal presented a one ring circus with an hour and a half performance in theaters. It featured Prof. William Hays with the elephants Muggins and Tiny May and the pony Buster. This show, when it appeared at the Empress Theatre in Cincinnati, opened with an introductory tournament and closed with a wild west exhibition. The presentation included, among others, May Day, a marble posing horse, the three Nelson sisters on the tight wire, high school horses, bareback riding acts, bucking mule riding and Nebraska Bill's Wild West with broncho busting and a rope and whip act.

There was a parade on Wednesday and Friday noons with a few turns around Government Square to publicize the Thrift Stamp Drive. This show was out for one month, opening at an army camp in Battle Creek, Michigan before going to theaters in Detroit, Cleveland and Cincinnati. John Fuller was the equestrian director.

For the tenting season of 1918 Royal took his performing stock to the motorized Coop & Lent Circus. He furnished 26 thoroughbreds and manege horses that danced, pranced and did the tango, fox trot and gavotte with "the intelligence of man transferred to the brains of equines." He also leased four small elephants to the show. They were under the direction of "Elephant" Kelly and included Victor, Helen and Carrie. Feature performers were the Riding Davenports, Dallie Julian, Irene Montgomery, Ray Thompson and Frank Miller. The trucks, furnished by Service Motor Co., had to be sent back to their garages to be reworked in order to get enough power to pull the four wheeled wagons and trailers.

During the seasons of 1919 through 1921 and early in 1922, Rhoda Royal took out a railroad circus variously entitled Rhoda Royal Hippodrome and Old Buffalo Wild



A highly decorated baggage wagon on the 1921 Rhoda Royal Circus. Gene Baxter collection.

West, Rhoda Royal World Toured Shows and Old Buffalo Wild West, Rhoda Royal 3 Ring Circus combined with Oklahoma Ranch Wild West, etc. Initially starting on from three to six cars, in 1920 it became a fifteen car railroad show. It finally closed on April 7, 1922. An excellent detailed account of this show by Joseph Bradbury was published in *Bandwagon*, May-June 1961.

This interesting addendum was on a Rhoda Royal Circus newspaper ad for 1921: "Because he is a Wisconsin resident and is proud of the record that the State is making in the dairy industry, Mr. Royal will give a splendid cow away at performances in Dodgeville. There will be no strings to this gift. Cow tickets will be given free to all who enter the Big Tent. The cow is an Iowa County product and has been purchased from James McGilligan."

In another 1921 newspaper ad for the Rhoda Royal Circus, Royal used his wife's maiden name in featuring "Norenberg's Tango Dancing Horses."

Not willing to give up the idea of again having a full fledged railroad show, in 1923 Rhoda Royal planned with Frank West, a carnival operator, to put out a ten car circus. It was visualized as a one ring show with excellent acts playing one week

stands under auspices. However, the plan was never realized. He had his high school horses on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey that year.

No significant references could be found for 1924 and 1926 or for the second half of 1925. However, he played a series of spot dates in the first four months of 1925. In January, the elephant Muggins appeared at the Misericordia Hospital Charity Indoor Circus in Philadelphia.

Several weeks later Muggins was at the Indoor Circus of the Canton, Ohio Eagles Lodge along with Royal's performing ponies and Hee-Haw the mule, King the liberty horse, Madame Royal riding a high school horse, and May Wirth & Co. On March 2nd, the R. M. Chambers Circus opened at the Adelphia Academy in Philadelphia under the auspices of the Fraternal Order of Beavers. Royal's portion of the program involved Muggins, manege horses, Madame Royal and her high school horse, and Madame Carrie's troupe of ponies and bucking mules. Later that month Rhoda Royal and his animals appeared at the KKK Charity Circus in Clarksburg, West Virginia. The Klan was an active sponsor of circuses in the 1920s. In April a circus was staged at the Toronto Coliseum under auspices of the Great War Veterans' Association. Royal's performing elephants as well as the Orrin Davenport Troupe and

the Flying Fishers were part of the program presented there in peppy style.

New Years for 1927 opened in January with the Dutton Attractions producing the Miami Police Circus. Misses Barlow, Royal and Clarke rode the Rhoda Royal manege horses and Royal presented his high school ponies. John G. Robinson was the equestrian director, assisted by Royal and James Dutton.

Founded in 1920, the Robert H. Morton Circus was by 1927 the largest exclusively fraternal circus on the road. When the show went out in May, Royal was the equestrian director. Florence Barlow was the equestrienne prima donna and Royal's high school horses were ridden by Carrie Royal, Stella Cronin and Laurretta Morgner as they introduced four and six gaiters with waltzing and spiral steps, poses, cake walking and Charleston dancing. Ponies were handled by Carrie Royal. Muggins, the famous pachyderm, did versions of late dance steps and his equine friends posed. This act was worked by Carrie Royal, assisted by Mickey Blue. By the end of September Royal was putting together a big side show to make the southern tour with the Morton show which continued all winter with a brief layoff over the holidays. In October Muggins died while the circus was showing in Bessemer, Alabama. He had been exposed to cold weather while traveling in a stock car.

In the fall, Edward L. Conroy booked the Royal Circus Revue for the week of December 26th at the new Melba Theater in Corpus Christi, Texas, the first indoor circus to appear there. The Melba had a good size stage and a seating capacity of 1400. Among the features were the familiar manege and high school horses, two pony acts, two animal acts and two January mules. Several dates were also arranged in the environs of Corpus Christi.

In May of 1928 Carrie Royal appeared on the Robert Morton Circus. She and Carl Smith rode Silver and Denver, two of the high school horses. She also directed the Shetland ponies in a military drill.

The L. & J. Quality Circus of Excel



Rhoda Royal, equestrian director of the John Robinson Circus in 1929. Pfening Archives.

Animal Attractions went out that year from Columbus, Ohio. The proprietors were Paul M. Lewis and E. R. Zimmerman. Rhoda Royal's animals, Ray and Dorothy Herbert Thompson's horses and William Schultz's eight pony military drill were on the show.

Early in February of 1929 it was predicted that Royal would probably be equestrian director of the 25 car John Robinson's Circus which turned out to be true. By March the following well known trainers and performers were at Peru winter quarters: Rudy Rudynoff, Rhoda Royal, Mabel Stark, John Helliott, Clyde Beatty, Mr. King and the Clarkonians. In display #16 of the Robinson Show that year, Royal and Rudy Rudynoff had liberty horses in the two end rings and Mrs. Royal showed liberty ponies in the center ring. In display #12 she worked the "Borneo Jungle" elephants. Stella Cronin and Madge Fuller worked elephants in the end rings.

Earlier in the season, before joining John Robinson's, Carrie Rooney had been listed in the Sells-Floto program for Chicago as riding a high school horse and performing with elephants (one of five) and riding dogs (one of two). At that time a per-

former's moving from one American Circus Corporation show to another, particularly early in the season, was not unusual.

Rhoda Royal became equestrian director of Christy Bros. Circus in 1930. His presence was felt in the manner in which the program came off without a hitch. He was assisted by Bob Norton. Carrie Royal and Mabel and Fay James (mother and sister of the musician Harry James) were three of the nineteen riders in the big manege act.

During this period of their careers, the Royals moved about a good bit among the circuses then on the road. In the fall of 1930 they were on Sam B. Dill's Gentry Bros. Circus which toured on 72 trucks. Fred Crandell was the equestrian director and fine high school acts were done by Helen McLaughlin and Mr. & Mrs. Rhoda Royal. Mrs. Royal rode Goldie Locks, a remarkable horse. Its dancing and other numbers brought much applause.

In 1931 Carrie Royal was 45 years old and Rhoda was 66. Beginning that season on Sells-Floto, she was one of the women who worked the five groups of elephants. There was a total of 32 elephants on the show. The other elephant handlers were Stella Cronin, Loretta Tucker, Irene Montgomery Ledgett and Lillian Burslem. Soon after, Carrie transferred to Hagenbeck-Wallace where she appeared with her husband. There Royal presented the beautiful African zebras he had domesticated and she was one of 38 riders of high school horses in display #23. Harry J. McFarland was equestrian director and the manege riding and the three liberty acts, with twelve horses each, were under the general direction of Royal. In display #20 Dewey Butler presented spotted horses in Ring One, Rhoda Royal had white stallions in the arena and Ed Davis showed incomparable sorrels in Ring Three. While Clyde Beatty's arena was being taken down, Royal presented six cream colored horses in one end ring and Davis had zebras in the other one as leaping greyhounds cavorted on the track.

The next year found the Royals on Lewis Bros. Circus. Rhoda was

equestrian director and presented ponies with dog riders as well as a six pony drill and also football horses with a clown assistant. Carrie had one of three pony drills, an unusually well trained group which was expertly managed.

Rhoda Royal came on the Tom Mix Circus in July of 1935. His friend of almost 40 years, John Agee, was there as equestrian director. Royal stayed two seasons. In the big manege act of fifteen performers, he and Agee each drove English hackneys hitched to light fine harness buggies.

By early fall Royal was beginning to break several new horse acts for 1936. One was a big manege number with 30 horses and girls and the other was a 41 horse act with a pyramid platform arranged so that the horses moved in concentric circles. The next month the Royals were in California where Carrie had taken a home in Compton near the winter quarters and Rhoda had built a large number of stalls for the new stock and was busy in the three training rings.

The year 1936 was a memorable one for the Tom Mix Circus. This was the first time that a truck circus ever made a transcontinental tour. Royal was equestrian director, assisted by Alfredo Codona. He presented his famous liberty horses in the center ring with the Tom Mix ponies in the end rings. Carrie rode as a polo girl. The season ended at the new winter quarters in Anniston, Alabama.

In line with the plans for a regular horse show for 1937, Royal, in his role as equestrian director, made a trip to Kentucky in order to pick up some fine five gaited saddle horses. That season's program opened with a Gala Garland Entry produced by Agee. Carrie Royal was one of thirteen women manege riders on the track as Agee and Homer Hobson, Sr. had hackney horses in the end rings. The liberty horses were presented by Max Gruber (six in center ring), Rhoda Royal (four in Ring One) and Agee (four in Ring Three). When the show reached West Virginia in mid-season, Royal resigned and Agee again became equestrian director. Homer Hobson, Sr., replaced Royal



Royal visiting Cole Bros. Circus in 1936. John Smith and Albert Hodgini are at right. Pfening Archies.

with the four liberty horses in Ring One.

For circuses, the season of 1938 was one of the worst of all. In that year Honest Bill Newton, the son of Lucky Bill, took out Newton Bros. Circus under a big top 100 foot round with three 40's. The physical equipment came from the Walter L. Main Circus of 1937. Royal was the equestrian director on that show and rode the "drunken" horse Radiator. Due to poor business and bad weather the show underwent a mid-season reorganization and reopened at Bowerstown, Ohio as Hebron Bros. Circus under a 50 foot round with three 30's. Royal remained as equestrian director and continued to present his manege act. This show kept going until May of 1939 when the title was switched to Honest Bill Circus.

In July of 1940, after an illness of

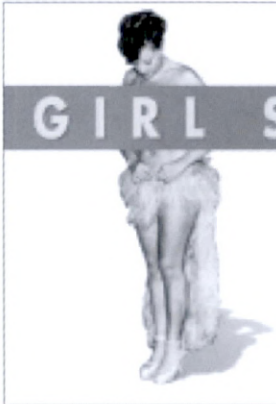
some weeks, Rhoda Royal entered the Alexian Bros. Hospital in Chicago where he died on the 22nd of that month. The funeral services were held under the auspices of the Showmen's League of America with burial in Showmen's Rest in Chicago. His only listed survivor was his widow Carrie.

Rhoda Royal was a unique personality in the circus—horse trainer, equestrian performer, equestrian director, mentor for many riders, producer of equestrian acts and entire performances, circus proprietor. He was at top level in all of his endeavors. In manner he was generally affable and approachable and willing to give a helping hand.

Carrie Noremberg Royal died on April 4, 1948, aged 62, in Toledo, Ohio. Interred in Toledo, she was survived by one brother and three sisters. Another brother, Charles, had died in 1944 aged 50. In 1921 he had been the front door superintendent on the Rhoda Royal Circus.

Articles in this series about John Agee, Denny Curtis and John Foley will appear in additional installments.

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FRANK A. ROBBINS

a most successful failure

PART TWO

By Robert Sabia

1885

Stepping up Toward the Front Rank.

Now that he had a successful railroad season under his belt, Robbins was poised to proceed in his quest to enter the rare air of large circuses. Besides physical size, the criteria for being in the front rank also included headliner acts, the best staffers, and a bigger city route, among other things. In addition, perhaps in reaction to some criticism received during the season past, Robbins started to emphasize his menagerie, advertised as a "fifty-cage menagerie." He was justifiably confident as he laid out plans for the 1885 season. Immediately upon completing the 1884 tour and putting his show to bed in Frenchtown, New Jersey, Robbins commenced placing ads in the *Clipper* seeking various people to populate his enlarged circus. He also offered to sell some light cage wagons (probably the residual from his mud show days), a tableau wagon and some canvas. His personnel needs included contracting agents, billposters, teamsters, canvas men, and performers, including bareback principal riders, curiosities, roller skaters, bicyclists, aerialists or any other performer who might titillate his interest.

He was successful in gathering about him the makings of auspicious presentation in 1885, at the early date of March 7th. It became apparent when it was announced in the *Clipper* that the following performers were already engaged. The headliner was Charles W. Fish who was arguably the finest bareback rider in the country. Joining Fish were Charles Lowry, jockey rider (repeater); James E. Cooke, rider and equestrian director (3rd season); Rosina Dubsky, equestrian (repeater); Col. John Foster, headliner clown (3rd season); Felix McDonald, animal trainer and

head of menagerie (3rd season); Alice McDonald, equestrian (3rd season); Rixford Bros. (John and Connie), acrobats; Metle (Mette?) Bros. (Rudolph and Louis); Annetta, the

A page from a four page courier used by Robbins in 1885. Author's collection.

snake charmer (repeater); DeComa Family (3), aerial bicyclists (repeater); Andy Gaffney, strong man with cannon balls (4th season); Cuponti; Jacket Chy's Royal Japs; Mlle. Alma (Delia D'Alma?), aerialist (repeater); William Harbeck; Leopold and Wentworth (Gymnast & triple bar?) (repeater); Philip Gibbons, con-

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FRANK A. ROBBINS' NEW SHOWS

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2-RING CIRCUS and 50-CAGE MENAGERIE

2 Vast Circus Rings! 1 50ft. Elevated Stage!

1 MUSEUM of HUMAN CURIOS! 1 AQUARIUM of OCEANIC MARVELS!

NEARLY 1/2 MILE TRACK for BICYCLE and UNICYCLE CONTESTS

More New, Unique and Famous Features and Rarities than any Three Shows now in Existence.

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The Colossal Temple of Genius and Art, where the best efforts of the Mightiest Lights of the whole Profession are presented to the public with a system and perfection which can occur nowhere else on the habitable Globe.

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BRILLIANT AND MATCHLESS

The Amusement Sun



All the World Has Not Produced Its Equal!

LOVELY LADY PERFORMERS 25

The Home and Abode of Dwellers in Forest, Cave and Jungle and the Vasty Deep. A Zoological Assemblage which richly rewards the votaries of Nature and leaves absolutely nothing further to be desired. It is a complete exhibit of about all there is marvelous in Wild Beast Realm.

TRAVELS, BY RAIL, UPON ITS OWN PALATIAL TRAINS OF

SPECIALLY-CONSTRUCTED CARS

FRENCHTOWN. SATURDAY. APRIL 11

cert clown; Maud Charwood, concert; Julia Hulskamp, concert; Thomas Haley, concert; Billy Mulligan, concert (4th season); George McConnell, concert; Mlle. Estelle, sideshow's long haired woman (repeater); Mlle Almee, sideshow's tattooed lady; German Rose, sideshow's queen midget; E. M. Reynolds, sideshow's performing birds (repeater); Etta Reynolds, sideshow's Albino; Flora Aymar; Alex Wilson, sideshow's ventriloquist; Madame Agnes Hall's Brass and Reed 12 member All-Female Band; Professor Oscar Perry and his 16 member band; and Willis Jackson's colored band and jubilee singers. The circus was to feature seven different kinds of music. It utilizing a slightly different title than the year previous: Frank A. Robbins' New Shows, Museum, 2-Ring Circus, and 50 Cage Menagerie.

The above listing was augmented about a month later in the *Clipper* by the following performers: Ali Berber's Bedouin Arabs, Leonard Ayres, John Wilcox, and Francis Palmer, human cannon ball. Also joining George Cole's concert were Leo Grant and Lillie Ellis. Fleshing out John Fulton's sideshow were Zuleika, Circassian Princess; William Russell, fat boy; George and Henry Zurus; Walter Broma, magician and Punch and Judy; an eight footed horse (repeater); snakes; and a giant ox.

On the staff side, in addition to manager Robbins were William Loper, assistant manager; Warren Bouton, treasurer; O. J. Ferguson, railroad contractor and manager of advertising; Henry W. Mann, contracting agent; Harry Hapgood, press agent; J. A. Reed, manager car No. 1 with 16 billers; F. W. Hodges, manager car No. 2 with 12 billers; W. H. Sylvester, manager of stereopticon exhibition and super of the bugle brigade with 6 buglers; brother Ora J. Robbins, advertising-program; Lucius Foster, boss canvas man (repeater) with 40 assistants; William Randolph, boss hostler (3rd season), with 45 assistants; and John Kent, master of transportation with 10 assistants. Felix McDonald had 20 men helping him in the menagerie.

Filling other roles were Cuponti, Walter Broma, and Charles Corbin



A young Charles W. Fish, featured rider with Robbins in 1885. Pfening Archives.

who joined John Fulton as ticket men in the sideshow. It is unclear if they also performed within the sideshow itself. The candy stands and reserve seat sellers included William Buxton, James Dains, Tony Burke, William McIntyre, James Casey, Thomas Eagan, Joseph Lynch, Ed. Crowley, Peter McLoughlin, Hugh Kelley and Timothy O'Donnell. "All sons of the Old Sod," said the *Clipper*, meaning they were Irish.

Canvas sizes were claimed to be: big top, 130 foot with three 50 foot middles; menagerie, 80 foot with five 40 foot middles; sideshow, 80 foot with a 40 foot middle; dressing room top, 80 foot with a 40 foot middle; and four horse tents and three cook tents. If accurate, this was quite a spread of canvas, sure to impress local viewers. Nothing specific was published about the train size but given the increase in the elephant count (4 large and 1 small), the apparent increase in lead stock, and obvious expansion of the big top capacity, it is reasonable to assume that the train must have been around 20 cars or more. An Ottawa, Ontario newspaper stated there were 22 cars back with the show. If this is

accurate, then combined with the two advance cars, the troupe was on 24 cars. All told, the company claimed to employ well over 300 men and women. Although this number seems very high, the true total was undoubtedly 200 plus. This number included a young Bert Cole (son of George) as mailman.

Robbins placed a "Call" ad for the opening in the April 4th *Clipper*. In the same issue, he also sought a press agent indicating that the previously announced Harry Hapgood was no longer with the company. As a result of Hapgood's dropping out, George S. Cole took over this responsibility as well as his previously announced assignments. This turned out to be very fortuitous as Cole was to be the best press agent the show ever had. The after notices are replete with complementary comments regarding his demeanor and efficacy.

The Delmarva Peninsular is a fairly large, very flat land mass bounded by the Delaware River and Bay, the Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay, over 130 miles long and 60 miles across at its widest point. Augmenting nature, man has caused it to become an island by building the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal at its northern perimeter, just south of Wilmington. By far the largest percentage of Delmarva consists of almost all of Delaware and a relatively small area of Maryland; although in real terms, Maryland's portion is still larger than that of Delaware's. The region's economy has been based upon agrarian- and fishing-related activities since its original settlements during the 1650's. It remains so today. Being practically surrounded by water, its climate is more temperate than its westerly neighbors. As such, it makes an excellent region for a spring or fall tour. How Robbins became exposed to this region is not known, but his formative circus years may have taken him there. How ever he became knowledgeable about this unique temperate zone, for his remaining show tours Delmarva played heavily in his routing schemes, commencing in 1885.

The season commenced at Frenchtown, New Jersey on Saturday, April

11th to good notices but light business in cold, rainy weather. The show immediately journeyed to Delmarva, playing the Dorchester County seat of Cambridge, Maryland on April 14. From the outset, Charles W. Fish was featured in the newspaper ads. The show was identifying itself as a 2 ring and an elevated stage presentation. Also notable was the relatively small reference to the comical clown elephant which in due time became a special feature of the show and its ad campaign. Admission was 50 cents and would remain so unless otherwise cited. As if proving that the above reference to mild weather is incorrect, Cambridge's circus day was "disagreeably cold and windy . . . but . . . fully two thousand spectators witnessed the evening performance. . . . The morning parade was about up to average. . . . Within the tents the riding, tumbling, swinging, and other acting was only medium and not so good as O'Brien's circus a year ago. The usual side shows, sharpeners and hangers on were about and did quite a thriving business. . . . [T]he managers and attachés seemed to be the most gentlemanly that have yet visited Cambridge. . . . The circus took about twenty five hundred dollars out of Cambridge and the county and left very little of it here. The actors, riders and players, men and women, looked haggard and careworn and the fearful life they are leading is plainly making inroads on their health. But there is money in it, and this is sufficient, with some people, to justify any sacrifice." The foregoing comments regarding the performance became more positive as a result of additional performers joining. Regarding the comments on grift, this was only the beginning.

The show dipped as far south as Salisbury, Maryland on April 17 before reversing its direction, playing Milford, Delaware on the 23rd and Easton, Maryland on the 24th. At the latter date, evidence of strict budgetary control was apparent. No newspaper ads appeared. Such aberrant behavior was for a showman explained in the following manner. The "Frank A. Robbins' circus was a good show, but the attendance was

not large, at least one thousand less than the attendance at O'Brien's circus last year. The reason of the falling off in the attendance was that Robbins did not advertise his show in the newspapers. When the advertising agent was here, he said he thought posters were all that was necessary. His notions about advertising cost the proprietor at least \$500." Given Robbins' inclination to widely advertise his show, this attitude seemed strange until clarified



at Chestertown, Maryland on the 27th. In the after notices, the *Chestertown Transcript* stated "The attendance was not as large as circuses usually draw here, either in the afternoon or evening, but the show is considered by those who attended one of the best that has ever exhibited here. The menagerie was small, but quite interesting. The circus was a two ring one. The acrobatic feats were interesting, and the riding of Fish was something astonishing. The *Transcript* has been asked frequently why the circus did not advertise in the Chestertown papers that, speaking for itself, it will explain the conundrum for the sake of the rest. The advance agent called on us, stated the amount of space he wanted, and we stated our price. He said it was more than he was authorized to pay. He telegraphed the head of the show for instructions and received a reply not to pay the price asked. Just here we may say that we sell our advertising space just as a grocer sells potatoes. We do not sell sometimes for fifty cents and sometimes for fifteen cents a peck." This refusal to pay for newspaper advertising seemed to arise only when Robbins' cash reserves were in scarce supply as they may have been at this time.

The next year, newspaper ads were plentiful at these same locations.

At Centreville on April 28, the weather did its best to prevent the show from enjoying a good day. Rain and high winds confronted the troupe. Nevertheless, three or four thousand attended both performances. "The show was rather beyond their expectations. For the last two or three years, the Peninsula has been monopolized in the show, or rather circus-line, by O'Brien's humbug of a show and his army-swindling camp-followers and New York rowdies. . . . The show was really a good one—in fact a first class circus—the agents and actors polite, affable and gentlemanly. . . . Both the female and male performers were up to the mark. The minstrel performance after the circus was also good. The Negro comedian, Phil Gibbons, and Tom Healy, the Irish comedian, in the concert which followed, were both good in their line. . . . Our people were well pleased with the show."

Departing Delmarva, the circus played Elkton, Maryland, to good business and excellent reviews with Fish being singled out as superior. Harve de Grace, Maryland (the future winter quarters of many Andrew Downie circuses) was visited on May 1st in rainy weather, but it garnered excellent business and after notices. After a stand at Oxford, Pennsylvania, the next day the show spent the ensuing week playing central Pennsylvania, exiting at Lock Haven on May 9th. About this time, Mr. Reed, who was the manager of Advance Car #1, must have left the company because a replacement was being sought. Robbins took his show quickly across New York with an objective of reaching Ontario, first at St. Catharines, just west of Niagara Falls. For well over a month, the circus remained in Canada.

The St. Catharines' date was followed with a day in Hamilton, located at the western point of Lake Ontario, on May 19. It received laudatory comments from the *Hamilton Spectator* regarding both the street parade and the perform-

ance. However, the early Ontario dates were confirmed by the show to be very poor in terms of business. The company then proceeded east, hugging the northern shoreline of Lake Ontario. It played its first big city date at Toronto on May 21-22. Toronto became the personification of "mixed reviews." For example, the *Toronto Daily Mail* opined that contrasted to what the public was lead to anticipate, they saw chiefly rickety vehicles of the baker-van type. "The historical tableaux and imposing allegories were not there—they probably remained at home with the distinguished romancer who writes about them. The marda (sic) gras representation was personated by three circus attaches . . . with fifteen cent false faces hiding their refined features. A 'cavalcade' of a half a dozen men and three females, three or four consumptive elephants, and as many measly camels, wretched-looking brutes, a 'sacred' ox from the wild west, rendered presentable by copious applications of pearline, and a dummy horse, ornamented with Toronto-made harness, complete what is called a 'stupendous culled collection of rare wild beasts and zoological wonders.'

"Robbins' circus performed to a very small audience in the afternoon yesterday and the numbers were not at all satisfactory to the treasury at night. The attendance was quite as large however as the show merited. At the afternoon performance there were no programmes, which was a cause of much dissatisfaction among the audience. This fault was remedied before night. The events and feats may be characterized on the whole as stale and unexciting. Not a single thing was done that was new, with, perhaps, the exception of some of the acts of the Rixford Brothers, acrobats. Their performance was pleasing. Mr. C. W. Fish, their bright, particular equestrian star, had to be apologized for. He appeared, but was sick, and if he gained no applause, he secured sympathy. The lady aerial bicyclist was also sick, but went through her work. The horizontal bar man was evidently suffering, and the combination of smile and grimace which mantled his features at the end of an act had a melancholy influ-

Frank A. Robbins newspaper ad used in 1885. Author's collection.

ence on those who observed it. It would be gratifying to pick out something to praise, but beyond the performance of the acrobats named, it cannot in justice be done." At least we know he actually saw the performance.

On the other hand, the representative of the *Toronto Telegram* viewed the show a bit differently. He commented: "The Frank A. Robbins' circus . . . gave a handsome street parade at 10 o'clock. The streets were filled with people, and compliments were freely bestowed upon the magnificent pageant. This afternoon the large tents are crowded, and the performances are pronounced the most artistic and wonderful ever given in this city. Charles W. Fish astonished all by his wonderful daring feats on his flying steed. . . . The other features of this circus, which are too numerous to mention, revealed artistic excellence in every

department. . . . The performance of the clown elephant, the only one on exhibition we believe, was the funniest thing we ever saw in a circus. It is marvelous how a dumb brute can be brought to such profession in acting. . . . Taken in all, Frank A. Robbins' show deserves the favor and support of the public." It isn't difficult to tell who got the free ducats. Unfortunately, the chances are that the *Telegram's* reporter never even saw the show or at least all of it. The review reeks of a press release generated by the circus.

Further calamity visited the troupe in Toronto when during the afternoon performance on May 22nd, Mademoiselle Alma fell 30 feet to the ground after a bar in her rigging slipped. She was carried from the arena and rushed to a local doctor. No prognosis could be made regarding the extent of her injuries, but she was able to be taken to the show train and departed with the company after the night performance.

Robbins continued in a generally easterly direction within shouting distance of Lake Ontario, visiting such towns as Milbrook, May 27; Trenton, June 3; and Prescott, June 6. Business appeared to be improving to the extent that it was characterized as good to very good. On June 16th, the show played the important city of Ottawa, the capital of Canada. Some thoughts from the reviewer included: "Of the ring performance it is impossible to speak too highly. Every act was good and there were plenty of them.

"One of the best features of the excellent entertainment was the daring bareback riding of Charles W. Fish, the champion bareback rider of the world, which it would be impossible to excel. A novelty was the high wire bicycle riding of Miss Susie Cormack, who rode a bicycle to and fro on a wire suspended near the top of the pavilion, while the De Coma Bros. performed a number of their wonderful and daring feats on a trapeze suspended from it. The tight rope dancing of Melle Dubsky; the wonderful feats of Rixford Bros., the star acrobats and the unequalled performances of Wentworth and Harbeck were among the other more attractive features of the perform-

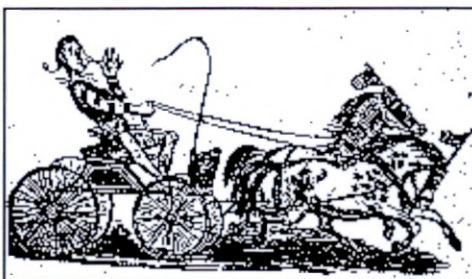
ance. The show is an excellent one in every respect." Ms. Cormack had not been previously identified so she may have been a recent addition.

The show slipped back into the United States for a single date at Fort Covington, New York on June 20th, although in all probability it secured a lot on the Canadian side of the border. Robbins continued into Quebec in short jumps, playing Coaticook, just 10 miles north of Vermont, on June 22; Sherbrooke, June 23; Richmond East, June 24; and St. Hyacinthe, June 25. At this point, the show was about 25 miles east of Montreal. On June 27th, it experienced a minor railroad wreck near West Farnham. Other than a short delay, no substantial damage was incurred. The next week found the show back in the United States, playing a variety of Vermont stands, including Middlebury on July 17, as it worked its way south.

In the July 4th *Clipper*, an unidentified attaché of the show wrote: "We are delightfully sedate, and some are actually growing fat. Mr. Robbins is winning a warm place in the hearts of all who are favored with a position in his company. His kind and considerate treatment, and a recognition on his part of meritorious conduct and talent are in marked contrast to that which prevails in so many of the companies nowadays. Phil Gibbons (black comedian in the concert) is 'all broke up.' He says: 'I'm a rank failure in this French country.' But we'll grant him the privilege of saying so. So long as Phil can find vent to that peculiarly infectious laugh of his, he certainly can not prove an entire failure. Very few, if any changes have taken place in our company since starting and I doubt if even Cole's dressing room is more angelic than ours. We are a happy melange of congeniality, nonchalance, happy-go-lucky, dolce-far-niente, goody-goody, hail-fellow-well-met lot, borrowing no trouble and sending home drafts. Telephones are not in demand. George S. Cole is manager of the concert, and is very, very happy in the possession of a pair of Attacapas pants. His soul delights in their azure tint, and his tongue shouts forth their praise." (I suspect most

people would be equally delighted if they had and wore azure pants.) In the same issue, Mr. Randolph, boss hostler, was seeking four and six horse drivers, duly sober.

It was back to Long Island during the last week in July and the first week in August. Repeat stands from 1884 were the rule. While rain held down attendance at the afternoon show in Flushing, Queens on July 29, clearing weather in the evening brought out the locals in droves, overflowing the capacity of the tent. They loved the performance. Charles W. Fish was singled out as the most agile and finished horseman in the profession and alone worth the price of admission. "Pete, the wonderful clown elephant, showed to what a high degree of proficiency these creatures can be trained. His comical tricks fairly brought down the house," a reviewer noted. The next day at Hemstead brought out huge



audiences and very favorable reviews. Again the performances of Fish and Pete the elephant were especially appreciated. However, the ticket speculators charging an extra amount for a ticket were not so favorably received. At Huntington, August 1; Greenport, August 3; Riverhead, August 4; and Sag Harbor, August 5 business continued big. At the last location, the paper stated the performance was even better than last year's. Fish again was mentioned as expert in his field. He continued his most difficult tricks and it caught up to him in Babylon on August 7. During the well attended afternoon performance, he attempted a double somersault and was unsuccessful, falling to the ground. He apparently reinjured the same areas he had injured in an accident a month previous. He was carried from the ring and taken to New York City for medical treatment. Magic in ticketing was repeated at Babylon to the dis-

gust of the locals. Concluding a most successful tour of Long Island, the afternoon show at Jamaica on August 8 was lost because of a funeral in town. The show continued to seek "Sober, Reliable People" through ads in the *Clipper*.

The next week represented a brief New Jersey tour commencing at Toms River on August 10. The circus got high marks in excellence and attendance. It was stated, however, that "(w)hile the show was, on the whole, well-managed and meritorious, there were . . . matters that seem to call for fair and friendly criticism. We are informed that a ticket scalper was allowed to conduct his swindling operations not only in close proximity to the ticket wagon but also in at least one of the tents where the free exhibitions given in the morning was in progress. A number of people were thus deceived and swindled. . . . Another mistake (to employ a mild term) was the catch penny announcement that eight members of the 'original Georgia Minstrels' would give a concert at the close of the regular ring performance, in which an extra admission fee was charged. Only one song was sung by these alleged 'minstrels' and their rendering of it was so destitute of melody that everybody seemed glad to excuse them from further efforts."

Toms River was followed by Freehold which experienced rain, holding down attendance in the evening. At Long Branch on August 12, the quiet and efficient manner by which the circus went about its affairs was noted. The locals packed the tents at night. Rain accompanied the show at Red Bank on August 12, making for a "John Robinson" or abbreviated performance at night. The tent leaked badly during the torrential downpour. The show concluded its brief New Jersey visit with a stand at Orange on August 15, and then it was on to Pennsylvania, visiting Carbondale on August 21st. The company played the Keystone state for the next three weeks, claiming good business throughout the tour. The performance was further enhanced when Harry Lamkins' and Julia Lowande's riding act joined in early September.

The near tornado conditions

prevalent in West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania caused havoc with several show including Robbins'. At Titusville, Pennsylvania on September 22, the Barnum & London Circus experienced a blow down which destroyed the big top, injuring a score of people, and causing a loss of the evening performance. About 25 miles west at Meadville, at approximately the same time, Van Amburgh's big top was also lost. Although there were many injuries, there appeared to be none serious. Finally, the next day, at Martinsburg, West Virginia, Robbins shared in the tumult. During the evening performance, a sudden, severe storm snapped a center pole and collapsed the big top. Many were injured, some seriously, but fortunately none killed. The company sustained serious financial losses.

Surprisingly, there was no mention of the storm when the show played Rockville, Maryland the next day, September 24th, arriving after a 65 mile haul. In fact, everything seemed to be order, from the street parade, to the menagerie, and then the performance. All received generous praise from the locals. The show then reversed direction and headed northwest to Frederick, Maryland on September 25 and Hagerstown on September 26. Upon arrival at Hagerstown and shifting the cars to the unloading location, a local 11 year old attempted to get on a flat car, slipped and was caught under the car's wheels. His foot was jellied and had to be amputated just above the ankle. It seemed that he would survive the tragedy. On October 1st, Westminster, Maryland was visited. The very large crowds were treated to excellent performances, with Fish being described as "wonderful." Col. John Foster had them rolling in the bleachers with his comical jokes. Messrs. Robbins and Cole were cited for their gentlemanly conduct.

As the first frosty days of autumn appeared the show amazingly headed north back into Pennsylvania, playing York on October 5 to fair business in rainy, cold weather. Robbins stayed in the rugged central Pennsylvania region, going west as far as Mifflinburg on October 15 in



the shadow of the Alleghenies before heading easterly to the hard coal mining region surrounding Wilkes-Barre. It played Nanticoke on October 19, and White Haven on the 20th. The next day, Manch Chunk was played, but not in the canvas arena. The show did not even attempt to erect its tents in the downpour and muddy conditions. Instead, it gave both performances in the Concert Hall to large crowds. The performance, although with significant allowances for its indoor environment, was widely applauded.

The troupe reached Catasauqua, just north of Allentown, on October 23rd. The next day at Phillipsburg, New Jersey (across the Delaware River from Easton, Pennsylvania.), the weather continued cold and raw, commonplace for the area in late October. Nevertheless, Phillipsburg turned out two fair size audiences who enjoyed the performances immensely. The usual suspects, Fish and the baby elephant, were greatly appreciated. In addition, Mlle. Alma gained laurels for walking with her head downward about 30 feet in the air. Other performers were specifically identified as well.

A long Sunday 90 mile jump, took Robbins to the slightly warmer clime in southern New Jersey, at Vineland for a Monday date. Then the show gradually headed toward its Frenchtown winter quarters, playing Glassborough on October 27, Woodbury on the 28th, and Burlington on the 29th. The latter town provided only very light business in heavy rain. An excellent performance was given. Stormy weather continued to follow the show. The day before closing, at Bordentown on October 30 heavy rain again diluted the audience to only 700 at night. Still, the performance was character-

ized as "first-class." Finally, on the last day of October, the 1885 tour came to an end at Lambertville. Now it was just cold, the rain stopping during the night. An excellent performance was given, although it was noted that it was too short. A number of performers left to catch trains to other locations during the day.

Business was light in the afternoon, but surprising good at night. The paper believed that the show had a good season as contrasted to many others which were alleged to have less success. The next day, the circus snuggled into its winter quarters at Frenchtown, unquestionably pleased to be out the winds, cold and rain that had followed it for the past weeks. October is not a month for touring the high hills of Pennsylvania, a lesson not forgotten by the young proprietor.

Robbins had to look upon 1885 as one of growth, new venues, and proof of his business vision. It was doable, creating a major show that could compete with the best, and do so successfully. He had opened new territory in Delmarva, Ontario, Western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Maryland where his name was not known and made a very good impression on the circus-going public. There were a few periods of bad business, but he had persevered. The poor business was more than offset by very lucrative periods. All in all, it was a wonderful, albeit perhaps too long, season. Now was the time to consolidate the gains made and 1886 was the year to accomplish this.

1886

Staying the Course

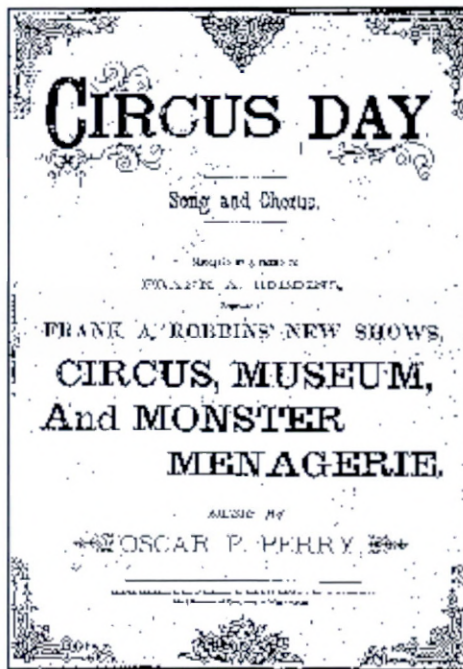
Why change? The formula for success had been laid down the previous season and there wasn't any reason to modify it. For sure, there were areas for improvement but all the criterion were validated: a strong performance, professionalism by all members of the troupe and heavy advertising. And of course, the appropriate amount of gift, specifically tailored for the community and circumstances.

After thawing out from cold, damp

October tour of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Robbins promptly prepared for the 1886 season. Immediately upon the new year, he commenced advertising for staff and performers. Early on, O. J. Boyd came on as the general agent, a key position in Robbins' scheme of things. Boyd promptly sought out candidates for contracting agent, press agent, and advertising car manager positions. Meanwhile the show was seeking a boss canvas man, boss hostler and train master. The most important rumor (and that is all it turned out to be) was the signing of Dan Rice.

As the season approached, Robbins was successful in attracting a very strong staff including many repeaters, an indication that many were pleased with how they were treated seasons past. The staff included William Loper, general manager (repeater); George S. Cole, press agent and special manager (repeater); C. Dale Armstrong, treasurer; Lucius Foster, boss canvas man (repeater) (with James Whalen as master of reserve seats); Andrew Gaffney, parade master (repeater); John Fulton, privileges and sideshow (repeater); John Burke, manager of outside tickets; Charles Shields, train master; Charles Kelly, program agent; Oscar Perry, bandmaster (repeater) with a 14 piece ensemble; John Griffin, master of stables and boss hostler; Albert Tuttle, veterinary surgeon; John Craig, menagerie superintendent; Mark Monroe, elephant boss; Harry Leoni, steward; and John Cullen, property boss. In the all important front end as noted above, Robbins selected O. J. Boyd as general agent and railroad contractor; Henry Mann, general contracting agent (repeater); C. Gauff, manager of advertising car No. 1 (with brother Charles Robbins daubing with the best of them); Frank Gayler, manager of advertising car No. 2; and H. Sylvester, manager of the stereopticon brigade.

Robbins engaged a strong line up of performers. He contracted with headliners Chevalier Ira Paine, a master of the rifle with an international reputation, and on the distaff side, the wonderful Jeal sisters, Elena and Linda, with their bare



This song sheet printed in 1886 by Samuel Booth, of 201 Centre Street, New York City, was dedicated to Frank A. Robbins. Joe Bradbury collection.

back riding routines. Backing them up were a host of skilled individuals, all of whom had excellent reputations, including: Charles Watson, bareback rider; James E. Cooke, bareback rider (repeater); Andrew Gaffney, (nearing 60) cannonball juggler (repeater); Cuponti, Hindoo juggler (repeater); William Harbeck, boneless wonder (repeater); the popular Rixford Brothers (John & Connie) gymnasts and acrobats (repeaters); William Smead, dancing barrel and horizontal bars; A. L. Watrigant, single trapeze and crystal pyramids; Harry DeForest, boy juggler; Richard Lewis, boy slack wire and juggling; and Eddie DuBouis, boy acrobat. In addition to the Jeal sisters, there were a bevy of beauties augmenting the performance, including Alna Danjanata, Hindoo snake charmer; Mlle. Alma, trapeze, ceiling walker and slide for life, (repeater); May Antonio, slack wire and juggling; and two iron jawed ladies, Millie DeGranville and Madame Lavelly. There were three clowns, Tom Barry, William Carroll (repeater), and Charles White (repeater).

And we mustn't forget the performing six elephant band and the

clown elephant (because the public certainly did not forget these great elephant acts), presented by Cooke until July 3 and then Tom Barry acted as the equestrian director and James White was the ring master.

Fleshing out John Fulton's side show was Ida Jeffreys, Circassian queen with snakes; Madam Turpin, long haired lady; Mlle. Aimee, tattooed lady; Mll. Loretta, performing birds, mice and cat; Professor Logernia, royal magician; Alexander Wilson, ventriloquist with talking heads; Zip, the original "What Is It;" Ashbury Ben, the spotted boy; and Professor William Jacob's ten piece black band. Working in George Cole's concert was Miss Mattie Bliss (keep this name in mind as it looms important in the near future), Serio-Comic; Pettit and White, song and dance (repeater); Billy Milligan, Irish and Dutch specialties (repeater); Master Lewis, change artist (and we thought that they were only working the ticket office); and the ten Delaware Colored Jubilee Singers with Professor Jacob in charge. There was a concert orchestra consisting of two violins, a clarinet, a coronet, and a basso.

Armed with a new title, the Frank A. Robbins' New Shows, Museum, Two-Ring Circus and Monster Menagerie commenced the 1886 season with high hopes that were generally realized. After an artistically and financially successful debut on April 10 at its winter quarters village of Frenchtown, the show immediately transited the 176 miles for a Monday date on the Delmarva Peninsula at Seaford, Delaware for a satisfactory day. On the next day, at Cambridge, Maryland, the show was still using 1885 advertising that featured Charles W. Fish, the Clown Elephant and a Fifty Cage menagerie with a total of ten elephants. The locals didn't seem to notice that Fish wasn't present as the press advised that the "Robbin's circus arrived . . . in a bright painted train of cars. . . . The animals seemed to be in good condition, and the actors and the acting horses fresh and looking well. The street parade about 11 o'clock was about up to the average, the excellent music and the herd of elephants and camels being the most

attractive features. The evening performance under the big tent was well attended, and the extraordinary feats of horsemanship, tumbling, wire balancing, etc., were much appreciated. The trained elephants were an especial feature of attraction. The most perfect order prevailed and the managers and attaches were pleasant and polite all." It was a very nice start and fully consistent with the show's objectives. Finishing the first complete week on the eastern shore were fairly long jumps including two in excess of 80 miles as the company got as far south as Eastville, Virginia on April 15 before heading northward again. Weather and business was good at all stands.

At Eastville the elephant George ran away, seriously injuring John Craig, head menagerie man who made the mistake of getting between George and his planned route of travel. George's reign of terror was relatively brief, certainly shorter than Craig's recovery period. After leaving Eastville, the train was in a collision that damaged some sleepers. Andrew Gaffney sustained a head injury that caused him to be out of the lineup for several days.

The following week saw a continuation of fine weather and excellent business. At Dover, Delaware, the state capital, on April 21, the Governor viewed the performance with a near full house on hand. Great after notices were received, including a comment regarding the lack of swindlers. Similar notices were recorded the next day at Easton, Maryland with particular positive comments of the drill of the soldier elephants, the outstanding slack wire by May Antonio and the professionalism of special manager George Cole. Milford, Delaware, the next day, was the hometown of Professor Jacobs and his Jubilee Singers. They were warmly and enthusiastically received by their hometown folks. Robbins came to his financial senses at Chestertown, Maryland on April 23 because heavy gambling was reported by one of the two local papers. The other paper saw no such activity. Both considered the performance and the parade

excellent with the elephants cited as being the best feature of the show among many fine ones. They also stated Robbins and Cole were gentlemen of the first rank. The final week in April found the troupe taking a long jump of almost 120 miles to West Chester, Pennsylvania, where big business was at hand. In



spite of cold rain at Bristol, Pennsylvania on April 27, another big business day was experienced. A number of the show's attaches traveled to Philadelphia from both West Chester and Bristol to visit the combined Barnum-Forepaugh Shows playing there. Crossing the Delaware River into southern New Jersey at Salem on April 26, there was a 10:00 a. m. arrival because of a small rail incident which damaged two cages. With his spirited crew, canvas boss Lucius Foster had the show ready almost at the planned starting time. It was at Salem that the clown elephant Jack arrived from South America and was pressed into immediate duty. At Bridgeton, the locals saw a fine street parade commencing at 11:00 a. m., followed by a free high wire walking exhibition at the lot. The two damaged cages were repaired locally that day.

There was a small crisis at Millville, New Jersey on April 30 when the weavers at the local mill demanded to see the parade, a request was refused by management. The supervisors took a position by the front doors where they could see the parade but the employees could not. That did not stop the lady weavers who "escaped" though the machine shop and exited the back door. The ladies working in the basement demonstrated an even more brazen approach to view the parade by navigating up a little-used staircase and exiting through a upper

floor window. Such was the temper of the times.

Continuing with the temper of the times, a college town was always good for a rowdy prank and Princeton, New Jersey on May Day was no exception. An attempt to disrupt the show came to no avail and the college boys had to return to their books somewhat disillusioned in their capability of shaping the course of the world, or at least the circus world. Closing out the first three weeks, the accounting ledgers showed no losing days and generally good weather.

Heading ever northward, the company was briefly in the New York City metropolitan area, at Rahway, New Jersey on May 3, Hackensack on the 4th, and Nyack, New York on the 5th. Lots of show-related folks from New York descended upon the circus at these locations. Better yet, lots and lots of the locals purchased ducats to their great satisfaction. They loved the parade and the performances with the seven elephants getting wonderful accolades. Cole continued to receive high marks by the press which also observed some of the ever-present sharpies doing their thing. The week closed on a down note as Saugerties and Rhinebeck, on opposite sides of the Hudson River, turned in poor business in foul weather. Rather than crossing the river by ferry at Kingston, the show journeyed up the west bank from Saugerties to Albany and then headed south on the east bank to Rhinebeck. It took a run of more than 100 miles, to go 15 miles as the crow flies. All for naught because in fact, Rhinebeck registered the first losing day of the season.

From Rhinebeck, the show headed into Connecticut at Collinsville on May 10. Rain continued and the company registered light business. While in Collinsville, Robbins penned a letter to E. Butler who apparently was holding a rail car belonging to the show. It may have been a newly purchased car located in East St. Louis, Illinois. Robbins had apparently previously paid \$129.65 to transport the car to Jersey City and then on to the show. Butler promptly acknowledged the previous

replace James Cooke. Given the fact that Cooke resigned his position of equestrian director shortly thereafter, it appears that there was a measure of discord between Robbins and Cooke, a long term performer for the show. It seems that matters were patched up as Cooke finished the season, although he was not back the following year. Robbins was also selling his donkey act. In a letter dated July 2nd, Leon Washburn purchased it, picking it up when the show got closer to New York City. Meanwhile, the show played its initial date in Massachusetts, just a couple of miles south of the New Hampshire line at Winchendon on July 9. Once again the Bay Staters loved the performance with the "India Rubber Man" and Ira Paine being cited as the best in their craft. The omnipresent elephants were not overlooked, being characterized as "the best that has ever been exhibited in this section and their feats were heartily applauded."

For the next five days the show worked its way south, enjoying great business. At Gardner on July 10, Gold Dust could hold back no longer and like the frustrated young lad, ran away from home. He did so while performing, an unforgivable act which was communicated to him in short order. En route to Webster on July 14 (just south of Worcester), a derailment caused the destruction of Robbins' private buggy and the stake and chain wagon. This delay caused the show to lose the afternoon performance at Webster. Train mishaps became the fashion as two days later at Putnam, Connecticut, there was another derailment just as the show was proceeding to its next date at Phoenix, Rhode Island. Team driver John Willy lost his legs and died within a few minutes. Willy, who had just quit the show, was going to return to his home near Rochester, New Hampshire, where he had joined up barely a month earlier. A few other employees were injured. The show lost a band chariot and monkey cage with the contents of the latter quickly scattering throughout the area. Most of the monkeys were recaptured over the next few days. Other cages were damaged as well. The loss was estimated to be in

excess of \$1500. The menagerie remained at Putnam until the four damaged flats were repaired at Providence, Rhode Island. Without menagerie acts except for elephants which stayed on the show, business continued good to great with Westerly, Rhode Island on July 20, and Kingstown on the 21st, falling in the latter category. The local Westerly press commented that the performance was better than Forepaugh's. It stated that it "is so well done that it is difficult to particularize. The beautiful Hindoo snake charmer is worth going a long distance to see. Andrew Gaffney, the modern Hercules, Linda Jeal, the bare back rider, May Antonio on the slack wire, and Mlle. Alma in the mid air flying rings were only a few of specialists, each alone worth more than the price of admission." The review went on to discuss the elephant act and Paine's shooting as being the very best.



Linda Jeal, a lady rider with the Robbins show in 1886. Pfening Archives.

The show turned east, rapidly traversing Connecticut. It played two dates just above Hartford to good business. Lucius Foster built a new stake and chain wagon, replacing the one that was destroyed near Webster nine days earlier and it was placed into service at Rockville, Connecticut

on July 23. Along weekend run took the show to Long Island, a favorite haunt, having played there for three consecutive years. It crossed the Harlem River by ferry. The show was traveling in at least two sections. Flushing was the opening date on July 26 on the Island and provided two nice houses. Lots of visitors came from the City, seven miles distance. Robbins' family rejoined the show. The next day at East New York (section of Brooklyn) heavy rains lasted until noon. Then the sun shined through, bringing another good day at the box office. During the matinee, George Cole presented Robbins with an elegant diamond stud, costing \$500, a gift of both some attaches and outside friends. All stands either met or exceeded previous years' business; a testimony to the pleasure given in the past. After loading out in Riverhead and en route to the next day's stand at Sag Harbor on August 3, the animal men heard a terrible fracas in an animal car containing among other beasts, Charley, the largest elephant, and two camels. The elephant got loose in the car and was proceeding to communicate his views on the animal kingdom's hierarchy to the camels. When the car reached Sag Harbor, it was separated from the rest of the section and run off to a siding next to an open field.

Other animals in the car were so alarmed that they were still screaming at this point. The elephant was quietly unloaded and secured. Upon entering the car, the attaches found both camels horribly beaten; one dead and the other so seriously injured that he had to be shot. This was the second animal loss in less than a week as one of the largest male lions died at Glen Cove on July 28. The Island's newspapers were very complimentary about the performances and management, but the legacy of grift continued to generate appropriate commentary. Amazingly, the papers didn't seem to connect the management with the nefarious activities that abounded. The Island tour ended with the only light business day, at Long Island City on August 7, across the East River from Manhattan. Rain in buckets was the cause of a lack of patrons. The

menagerie, however, was strengthened by the addition of several rare animals of an unidentified genus.

The show recrossed the Hudson by ferry at Weehawken, New Jersey, opposite 40th Street in Manhattan. Then it was an 18 hours jump north to mid-New York State at Delphi on August 9 where good weather and business greeted the Robbins' troupe. The show continued north for the remainder of the week reaching Plattsburgh on Saturday, the 14th. With the exception of Plattsburgh where heavy rains had its effect upon business, the weather and business was just fine. At Balston Spa on August 11, the show received a new 60 foot dressing room tent and a 5 pole menagerie tent canvas. In celebration of this important event, the elephant Gold Dust took off to share the good news with the locals. He returned after a chase by elephant boss Mark Monroe, who was then busy convincing Gold Dust that there was no future in being an elephant newsboy.

The company headed west into central New York, traveling just south of the Canadian border, performing to the pleasure of the locals. Everyone enjoyed the elephants, Ira Paine and the bareback riding of the Jeal sisters and James Cooke. Other acts received praise at different localities. No town or village was particularly pleased by the sharp practices of the ticket sellers and gamblers. Nevertheless the papers universally invited the show back the next year. At Watertown on the 28th, the paper noted that William Smead (barrel act and horizontal bar) and John Buxton were locals and had many friends in the area.

The show was routed into Oswego on the shores of Lake Ontario on August 30. Gradually heading south, the show experienced good business the entire week, culminating at Ridgefield Springs on September 9. There the local paper had very favorable comments about Frank Robbins. It noted his successes and the fact that he married a Newport, New York lady whose residence had been but 30 miles to the north. The paper



further mentioned that there were 17 cages in the menagerie. It went on to say that with the exception of Barnum's and Forepaugh's, the show was the best on the road. Kudos were also given to George Cole for his gentlemanly conduct.

Leaving New York and its fine business behind, the Show took a 150 mile Sunday jump to Nicholson, Pennsylvania, just north of Scranton. At Pittston on September 7, John Griffin, the boss hostler, and Mlle. Alma, trapeze artist, were married. Reality set in during the Pennsylvania stands as business dropped off, Nicholson being the exception.

The menagerie was improved again by the addition of several more rare animals at Milton on the 11th. Working its way west and then south, the show played a dozen dates throughout the center of the state, exiting at Everett on the 18th. Then it was a very long jump of over 200 miles into West Virginia at Cameron, squeezed between the borders of Pennsylvania, and Ohio where business improved noticeably. For an unknown reason, six consecutive dates in West Virginia were afternoon only. The jumps were all relatively short but the population was small, perhaps too small to invite two performances. It wasn't until Oakland on the 28th before the standard two performances per day resumed. Arriving at the larger towns of Virginia, at Winchester on the 30th, business was generally good. From time to time, the show resorted to the single performance per day at the smaller locations in Virginia. It played southward in the Shenandoah reaching Roanoke on October 11th.

The *Clipper* of September 26 reported that the show was in a

billing war with John B. Doris, and Barnum and London throughout the state. The company passed up Lynchburg because of the competition. The circus went as far west in Virginia as Abingdon on October 15, before heading east again, reaching the large city of Norfolk on October 27th. It was a very short ferry ride that night to Portsmouth, just across the Elizabeth River. Then it was back to the south central part of the state at Chatham on November 1, before finally heading north, closing its very long season at Culpepper, about 50 miles south of Washington, D. C., on November 4.

Returning to Frenchtown the next day, Robbins and his staff could recount an excellent season with good business almost every day until reaching Pennsylvania in early September. For the next two months business was spotty, with very good days offset by ones with light patronage. There were several rail accidents which must have been considered par for the course at that time. Although there were also injuries to personnel, most folks recovered in a short time. Turnover was relatively minimal. Most of the acts played the entire season, an indication of being paid on time in a generally harmonious atmosphere. As the season was drawing to a close, the superb rider, Charles Fish, was returning from a European tour, to sign with Robbins for the 1887 season. The Jeal sisters did likewise. In November, it was announced that sharpshooter Ira Paine and wife would also be back. As such, a very strong performance was in the promise of the coming tour. Coupled with the knowledge that the essence of his very effective staff would be back, provided Robbins with justified confidence that additional investment in the physical properties of the show was most appropriate. From all indications, he was correct in his 1886 plan to improve the show and "Staying the Course." He merely had to continue to reach upward to achieve his ambition to have the finest of shows in the finest of cities.

NOAH'S ARK

A Menagerie and Circus That Never Came To Be

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

The mini series on Noah's Ark that appeared on ABC television on May 3 and 4, 1999, brought to mind another Noah's Ark that was planned in 1912.

Frederick S. Millican (1865-1938) was the promoter of the project. He had managed an Indian Congress at the Buffalo Exposition in 1901 and had concessions at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and other fairs in Atlanta, Nashville, and Omaha. He had a long relationship with Col. Frederick Cummins of wild west fame. He claimed to have taken the first rodeo to England in 1907.

He also owned the Old Plantation Shows, Samens and Millican Mardi Gras carnival and Millican Mammoth Minstrels.

In 1912 Millican incorporated the name Noah's Ark in the state of Washington, and applied for a copyright on the name. An office was opened in San Francisco.

An elaborate two-color booklet described the project. The publication was designed to lure investors in a boat show that would tour the world.

The introduction related to the historic background of the original ark. "Many men have acquired fame and fortune by the development of ideas borrowed from the Ancients. Columbus read of the wonderful voyages of Eric the Red westward and of strange lands across the great sea, and acting upon the idea discovered America.

"The Greek mechanic, Hero, invented a revolving toy propelled by steam when the world was young. Watt and Stephenson developed the idea and gave us the steam engine.

"Phoenician sailors ages ago discovered and used the power of electricity as an amusing trifle. Bell, Edison and Marconi developed their discovery and have become wealthy and renowned.

"The compass was a toy used by the

Chinese for thousands of years. Europeans recognized its possibilities, and its application to navigation has made the trackless oceans roadways for our commerce.

"So with gunpowder. The Mongolian invented it to make a noise and a stench. In the hands of modern workmen it has become, the basis of enormous wealth.

"The same Chinese used movable type for printing signatures from when our forefathers were barbarians. Caxton borrowed the idea, applied it to a greater and more profitable use and made possible for us modern thought, civilization, luxury, and wealth.

Frederick S. Millican, promoter of Noah's Ark. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

"The Bible story relates that six thousand years ago Noah built a great ship, gathered specimens of all living things and took them into the Ark. Since that time the story has been told and retold all over the earth, in every age, and fascinates us still. Every child counts a millimeter ark among its treasures. It is a wonderful idea. Publishers and toy makers have exploited it to some extent; but the real commercial value of it has until now been overlooked."

Millican then outlined his planned project: "It is at last proposed to make use of the wealth of sentiment and interest attached to Noah's Ark, and to construct a modern ship bearing that name, built along special lines, and equipped as a great floating menagerie museum, circus, playhouse and conglomeration of shows

with an arena, made possible by a patented device, seating upwards of seven thousand persons, carrying, artists of the highest class and bringing the whole into every sea-harbor and navigable river port in the world, so planning the route that while shows traveling overland can only exhibit about 180 days per annum, this will present its program 300 days of every year, at much less cost and with infinitely greater attractiveness, adding to their features, and the stupendous interest of its original, wonders that belong to the age in which we live.

"This is a sound business proposition, providing for the manufacturing and assembling of valuable assets for every dollar of investment, and offering in return a positive and splendid harvest of profit.

"There is something in the exhibition of feats of physical skill and of performing in all ages has appealed strongly to mankind. In the heyday of

Roman glory the most magnificent structures in the Eternal City were devoted to such shows under the patronage of Consuls and Emperors, and indeed the very word Circus has come to us directly from those times. The modern revival of the circus, however, may be traced to performances given in London, England in 1770, by Philip Astley. After Astley, came Ducrow, Hengler, and Sanger. On this continent, Ricketts appears to have been the pioneer, performing before George Washington in Philadelphia in 1780.



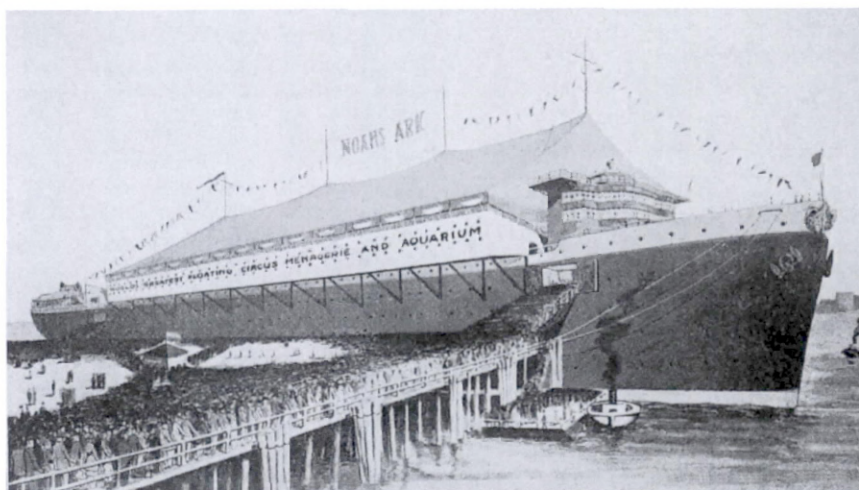
During the past fifty years P. T. Barnum, James A. Bailey, Adam Forepaugh and, others have toured the United States using enormous tents, employing hundreds of performers, and conveying all, with menageries, in privately owned and especially constructed railway cars. In small towns the circus is the amusement event of the year, and theatrical companies hesitate to play in any place where the circus has recently been. Even in New York City the patronage given to the Barnum and Bailey show, during its annual stay of a month, has an appreciable effect upon the receipts of the regular theaters. In smaller towns, the clean up of cash made by a traveling circus has frequently been so complete that the local banks have had occasion to interview the management and arrange to retain money for their clients.

"Given a novel show of real merit that could be taken around the world by some device that would eliminate the factors of loss named above, a show that would appeal to all classes and offend none that could play practically every day of the year, be transported economically and entire, and in such a way that deterioration should be reduced to a minimum and loss from neglect or rough handling eliminated, and add to that competent, experienced, businesslike management, and you will have the biggest money maker over thought of.

"The public will see a meritorious show at any cost. If a clever, high-class program is presented, patronage is assured. Ahead of all other shows, one which can offer for exhibition not only all the beasts of the forest but also, the ordinary circus can not present, birds of the air, fishes of the deep, strange men of little known races, and clever entertainment, must get the cash.

"There is probably more money in the traveling show business than any other.

"Gigantic combines or lucky speculations may offer superior possibilities, but the risks are greater. This pleasure loving and relaxation seeking age demands the show. The public needs no coaxing to spend its money freely with the circus. When



The proposed ship with big top on top deck.

the gates open it is there with the dollars and will fight to cross the barriers and pay its first and last cent to get in. If the show is novel, a genuinely new idea, the management will have to make special arrangements to get the gate money taken to the bank.

"The principal factors that militate against the ordinary traveling show are:

"1st. Transportation difficulties. It takes so long and costs so much to bring a show, say from the East, that only a part of it can come to the prairies or over the Rockies. The rest of the world is almost impossible.

"2nd. Weather and climate. For nearly six months of every year trains cannot be depended upon to get through on time. A large show that must play almost every day, and must run to schedule dates, is consequently idle for nearly half the year.

"3rd. Deterioration of the plant. A circus tent, costing a small fortune, lasts for only one season. Train handling and rough packing destroy thousands of dollars worth of property. Lack of proper care, unavoidable on land journeys, involves serious loss of animal life.

"The average large circus costs annually for maintenance, deterioration, transportation, and all expenses, while on the road for twenty-six weeks, one million dollars (\$1,000,000).

"It can seldom operate more than six months per year, while weather conditions favor travel and attendance. Its takings would not be less annually, however, than three million

dollars (\$3,000,000).

"Profit, from such a venture, would not be less than two million dollars (\$2,000,000) per annum.

"Noah's Ark can do much better than that. The plan secures cheap transportation, minimizes the loss of property and life, makes it possible to show almost every night the year around, brings the whole show to every ocean or river port, and provides for a great safe arena in which there can be unobstructed vision.

"Suppose that Noah's Ark was expected to arrive in your town. The Associated Press would advertise the coming event with flaring headlines. With tooting sirens and flashing many colored searchlights, our ship would enter the harbor and drop anchor beside the pier, in the heart of the city, and in full view of the excited and curious crowds. The sliding arena would be extended. The awning would be stretched over the arena, a gorgeous wealth of bunting, flags of every nation known would decorate the handsome interior. The deck would be covered with a patent, turf-like mat. The whole ship would be flooded with light and color. Bands of all sorts of instruments would be playing, bells would chime, and steam calliope's sound. Everybody would know that Noah's Ark has come

"As the landing stages were put in place, and the steel doors opened, the waiting thousands would crowd to see the show. Presently, the great arena is packed to its utmost capacity with the breathless and impatient multitude.

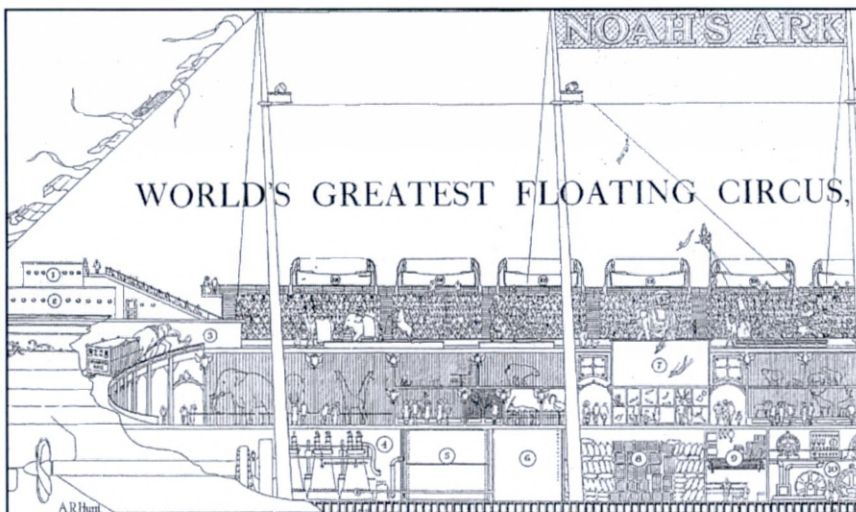
"Amid shouts of applause a working model of the ancient Noah's Ark appears and floats along. After it comes a procession of strange human beings in strange attire. Chariots, sedan chairs, jin-rickshas, Cape carts, Jaunting cars, sleighs, coaches, elephant houses, camel cars, juggernauts, follow. Then the animals, reptiles, and birds. It seems endless. Crocodiles, snakes, corridors, tigers, buffaloes, lions, elephants, camels, giraffes, horses, ostriches, easawarys, kangaroos, panthers, elk, apes, chimpanzees, etc. They circle the arena, cross and recross. Then they retire. The sliding deck uncovers the aquarium 40 feet long by 15 feet wide. Seals and sea lions appear, and exciting water sports follow. Then a grand circus, second to nothing on earth is seen, with acrobats, clowns, performing animals, jugglers, equestrians. It is a whole show, not a part of a show--what London and New York see, you see.

"It is proposed to build a modern steel steamship with an extreme deck measurement of five hundred and twenty-five feet from stern to stern, an extreme width amidship of eighty feet, molded depth of forty-four feet, gross tonnage of twelve thousand tons, maximum draft of eighteen feet, and a minimum draft of fourteen feet. Deck houses in which the three hundred members of the staff of entertainers will be accommodated with state rooms, lavatories, parlors, dining saloons, hospital ward, laundry, stores, etc., will be fitted with every modern appliance and conceivable device to secure comfort and profit.

"The roof of these houses will be stepped from the bulwarks toward the middle line of the hull in twelve tiers providing as many circles of seats for spectators.

"Arena space, 350 feet long by 125 feet wide, will be secured by a novel patented device.

"The deck houses will run on rails laid upon the main deck. Powerful engines will, by means of steel racks and screws, push brackets outwards from the sides of the hull, and m to these the deck houses will run, pro-

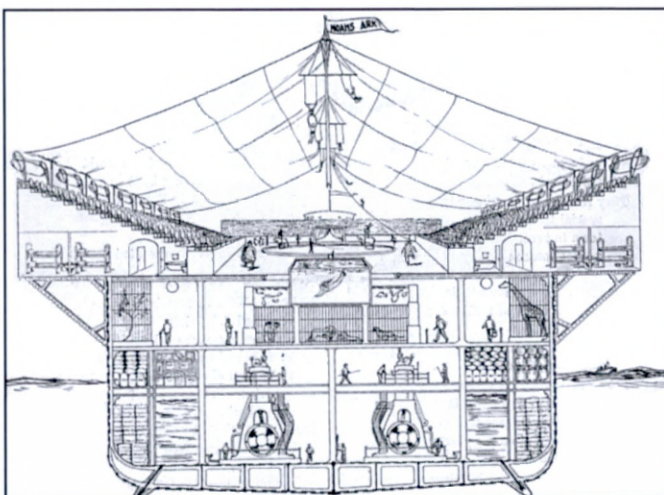


View showing animal cages and ramp to top deck.

jecting 25 feet on either side. This will provide for the performers a clear space of 350 x 50 feet, with twelve tiers of seats surrounding it, capable of accommodating no less than seven thousand spectators.

"A perfect ballast arrangement will make this whole structure non-cap-sizable (so perfect is the adjustment that if the seven thousand persons were placed on one side the ship would not list six inches), and water tight compartments will render it absolutely unsinkable. Reference to the diagrams will make this clear. These show the compartments and the double bottom, effectively eliminating all danger. A canvas awning will cover the arena during performances, giving it the appearance of a

A cross section view showing the seating and animal cages.



vast tent. In the center of this arena there will be a tank, covered by a sliding hatch, in which sea animals will play and aquatic sports and contests will be held.

"The lower deck will be a grand menagerie aviary and aquarium, where beasts, birds, reptiles and fishes may be seen in safety. Steel cages will be built in and so equipped that the highest degree of comfort will be afforded the animals on show.

"Elevators will run to the arena deck to carry the animals quickly to their places during processions or performances. For the grand procession which will precede every performance a circular ramp will rise to the arena.

"Every conceivable device to add interest, maintain order, and protect life and property will be installed. Telephones, wireless-telegraphic apparatus, and cables for shore connections with local telephone systems when in port, are included in the estimates and plans.

"Life boats and life-saving devices of the latest and best types will be provided and kept in perfect condition so as to satisfy not only the demands of the public but of the laws and regulations of every country of the world. A life saving drill will be a part of every performance, adding interest and providing a distinctly novel feature, while maintaining the apparatus in readiness

for all emergencies

"The ship's fire brigade will be equipped with every modern device to insure the speedy extinction of fire. This also will be made a feature of each performance in order to safeguard the interests of investors and visitors to the Ark. A form of special police will be maintained on the ship and work in conjunction with local officers so that the comfort and security of patrons and owners will be taken care of at all times in a manner impossible under any other conditions.

"The ship will carry physicians, dentists, and veterinary surgeons, who will have at their disposal suitable hospital and isolation quarters so that all risk of quarantine may be avoided, and so that there will be no danger of infection being brought into port. This feature will have large value in the eyes of investors in that it will decrease the cost of insurance and increase stability of assets.

"Employees will be cared for in such a way that the Ark will be likely to be favored by them. This will make it easier to get and keep the best mechanics, artists and performers. Their quarters will give them all the advantages and comforts of home, and in the libraries, concert hall, gymnasium, and parlors there will be attractions calculated to keep them both content and fit.

"To lessen vibration and prevent violent rolling in heavy seas, in addition to bilge keels, anti-roll tanks will give the ship the greatest possible degree of stability.

"Should the Ark (a very unlikely contingency) strike such heavy weather that every device would fail to prevent rolling and danger to animals, the cages are so arranged that by the use of slings this risk can be entirely removed.

"The arrangements for disinfecting, fumigation and ventilation are such that there will be practically be no odor in the menagerie. The sanitary conditions there will be as perfect as in the officers' quarters. For this reason the menagerie will be very attractive to persons who otherwise shun the ordinary zoo, however interested they may be in animals.

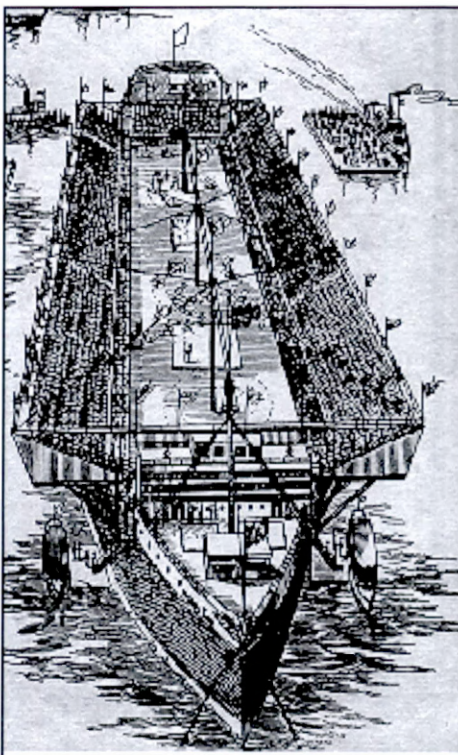
"Among the annexes will be a cold storage plant, printing press, laun-

dry, and tailoring and pressing department for the manufacture and care of the ship's properties. Electricity will be generated on board, and the superb lighting arrangements will of themselves be a great attraction.

"The ship will be built in a modern shipyard, upon sound lines. Every detail has been most thoroughly verified, and the services of competent naval architects and marine engineers requisitioned to make working drawings and assure a perfectly practical plan. Water tight compartments will make it absolutely unsinkable, and mechanical devices lessen vibration and motion and make the craft thoroughly seaworthy. The engines will be of the Diesel compression, consuming oil and emitting no smoke. There will be, therefore, no funnels, and consequently a great saving of deck room.

"Unlike ordinary gas engines these run on what is known as heavy oil and require no spark for firing the charge, which is exploded or burned by very high compression in the cylinders. The engines are of the cycle principle, and explode a charge at every revolution.

View showing the top deck from the front of the ship.



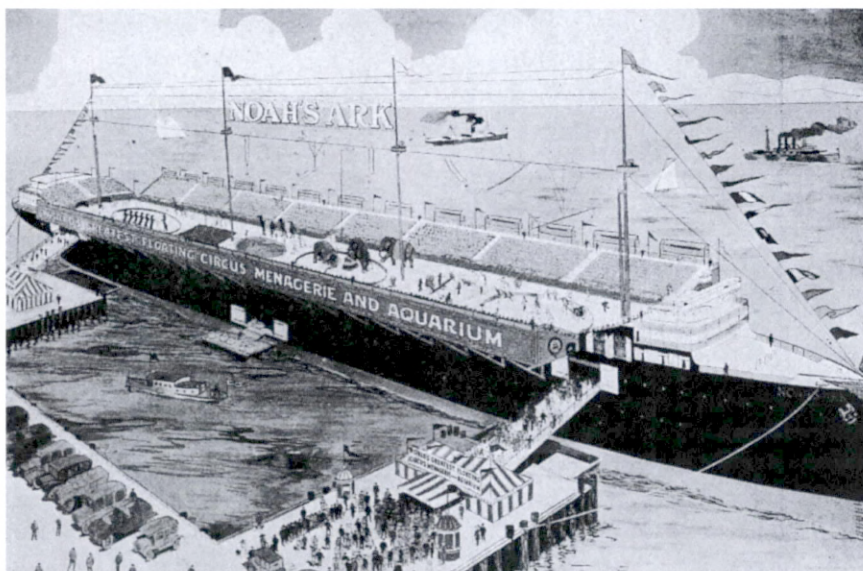
"In addition to requiring no stack, these engines have the advantage over steam of a saving of two-thirds of the ordinary engine and boiler room expenses; and sufficient fuel may be carried to run the ship over ten thousand miles without being compelled to seek an additional supply.

"The actual cost of building and fitting the Ark will not be more than \$750,000. The menagerie, aviary and aquarium stock will cost not more than \$100,000. Uniforms and the cost of assembling artists will not exceed \$20,000. The gross cost may be safely stated at \$870,000.

"Allowing, say, \$250,000 for incidentals and unexpected contingencies, the full capitalization would not exceed \$1,500,000.

"It will take ten years to cover once the available parts, where there is sufficient population within a practicable distance to make a show profitable; and that with the exception of a few stretches in Asia and an the African coast, and the crossing once in four years of oceans, few voyages will require more than five or six hours. While, therefore, circuses and other traveling shows seldom are able to open their gates and present their programs for more than twenty-six weeks in every year, because of the impracticability of roads during, wet and wintry weather, the Ark will be on duty over forty weeks and open for business in three hundred days for every one hundred and fifty available for other entertainments. The cost of traveling by water is always much less than by land. The safehousing of goods and care of performers and exhibits possible on shipboard, under such conditions as the Ark will present, will eliminate an element of enormous loss. Economies of every kind will be contingent upon the enterprise and show a handsome excess of profit, to say nothing of its unquestionable attractiveness.

"With two full performances per day and continuous exhibitions in side shows, vaudeville, museums and special sports, etc., the takings may be put conservatively at an average of \$20,000 per day, and the gross expense at \$3,000. Then the takings would be below the average circus income. But see what it would mean in profits \$5,000,000 per annum, over



300 per cent on the capital, Two ordinary days out of every week showing would pay all possible expense, including insurance and deterioration, and yet enable a dividend of 100 per cent to be declared; that is to sail, a dividend of 100 per cent would be paid if the ports visited were fifteen hundred miles or five days apart instead of being in the average under one hundred and fifty miles from pier to pier. This fact makes the entire globe available for profit.

"It is proposed to raise and apply the necessary capital for this enterprise in the following manner: The Ark has been incorporated in the State of Washington for \$1,500,000, of which amount \$300,000 will be in common stock to be used for the purchase of the patent and copyright. The remainder will be preferred stock carrying a seven per cent preferential dividend and offered to the public in ten dollar units. The first \$100,000 of this will be sold at par, and the rest above par, so that the expense of raising the capital may be provided for.

"Already large blocks of stock have been covered by investors anxious to participate in the advantage of early subscription. As soon as sufficient amount has been subscribed the contract for building will be placed, and the share price raised.

"It is the intention of the directors that the Ark shall be launched and equipped in time to make a preliminary Atlantic cruise, pass through the Panama Canal at its opening and be present at the San Diego and San

View showing the marquee on the pier at dockside.

Francisco Expositions when visiting the Pacific Coast in 1915.

"The construction will take about one year. Meanwhile the executives will be actively employed buying, engaging, assembling, and organizing exhibits and performers. Already the fullest data has been secured so that accurate knowledge is in the possession of the directors as to costs and sources of supply.

"We would emphasize the fact that the company owns a basic patent of great value, and besides this that the capital obtained will be invested in real assets easily convertible into cash. This practically eliminates all risk of loss and makes the venture only speculative as to the amount of the returns in dividends. The Ark will be a high class, modern steamship, providing all the potential investment features of such a craft, but available for splendidly original and novel rise.

"Some questions answered. The novelty of this proposition may suggest a number of questions, all of which we believe can be satisfactorily answered.

"First-That such a ship as is proposed can be built is assured by the fact that we have letters from responsible contractors prepared to undertake the work.

"Second-The cost of building the ship, fitting it up, and equipping with animals and all properties has been

verified by direct communication with reliable sources of supply.

"Third-Accurate data relative to the available ports, as to distances, populations, harbor dues, depths of water, tides and favorable seasons have been obtained from official publications.

"Fourth-The practicability of the patent device and safety and effectiveness of all the arrangements are vouched for by a thoroughly competent engineer and marine architect.

"Fifth-The basis of profit estimates are the actual returns of traveling shows. In every case of expense we have quoted round figures in excess of fractions and in regard to returns round figures below the facts. Possible extra costs have been allowed for, but extra possible income disregarded.

"Sixth-Nothing has been hurriedly done. The whole matter has been given time and the most careful thought before being placed before the public.

"ESTIMATED INCOME

"Three hundred days, showing twice, to 7,000 persons at each performance (4,200,000 persons per annum).

"Four million, two hundred thousand persons at an average of \$1.50 per capita, \$6,300,000.

"Gross cost of operating at \$3,000 per diem, 365 days; also allowing for deterioration, repairs, and interest (\$250,000), \$1,245,000.

"Estimated net profit per annum, from gate money alone, \$5,055,000, or aver 300 per cent per annum on the entire capitalization.

"These figures are, of course, only estimates, although great care has been exercised in preparing them. The general admission to the Ark will be fifty cents. A further charge of from fifty cents to a dollar will be made for reserved seats, and for boxes five dollars. In addition to that there will be income from side shows. These, together, will bring the average per capita well over \$1.50."

Millican was unable to sell enough stock to proceed and the project was abandoned. The planned massive animal exhibition never came to be.

Frederick S. Millican died on December 5, 1948 in Hollywood, California.

Side Lights On The Circus Business

PART THIRTEEN
By David W. Watt

Editor's note. The dates listed are the days the articles appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Gazette.

March 7, 1914

I had the pleasure of attending the first annual ball of the Showmen's League of America, given in the Louis XVI room in the Hotel Sherman, Chicago, Wednesday evening, March 4. I had anticipated a grand evening and must go on record as saying that the affair exceeded anything I had ever dreamed of. My friend, Colonel W. F. Cody, president of the league, "the grandest old scout of them all," put himself out to make it pleasant for me. Years and years ago I was an active member in the tent show field and as Colonel Cody grasped my hand Wednesday night and said, "Dave, we all love you," in fancy I wandered back to the old days when I handled the finances for the Adam Forepaugh shows. I only wish that space permitted me to tell the readers of the Gazette all about what happened in Chicago at the Showmen's League of America ball.

The ball was held at the Sherman, Chicago, Wednesday evening March 4. It was a gala event. Celebrities from every branch of this profession of entertainment were present to participate in what has been considered by folks who are accustomed to attending unique entertainments as the most enjoyable affair which has been arranged in Chicago.

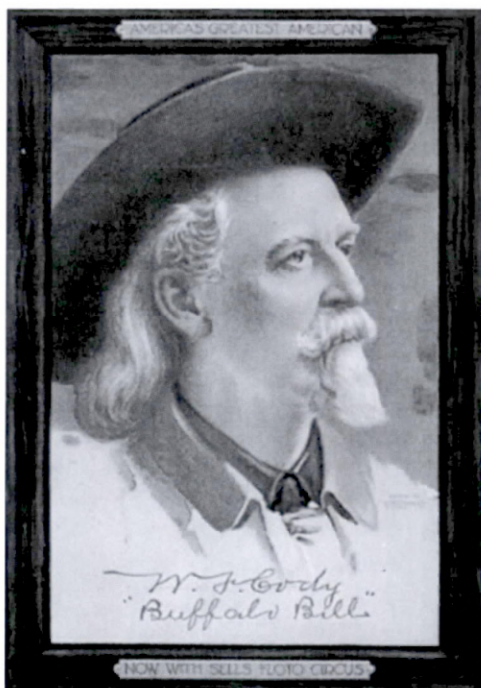
Japanese lanterns, etc., embellished the West Room, which was transformed into a replica of Maxim, Paris. Harlequins and jesters, coryphees and ballet dancers, comedians and tragedians, and all sorts of entertainers, helped to make the ball an event which will go down in history as the most successful as well as the most enjoyable ever arranged.

It is not uncommon for the Hotel Sherman to give banquets and balls and all sorts of activities; in fact there is a function on there every night of the year, but the way Frank Behring, the general manager, and his corps of assistants handled the Showmen's League of America ball deserves the highest commendation.

Dinners were served in the Gray Room, immediately adjoining the Louis XVI Room, where the ball was given, and a buffet dinner was given to the hundred entertainers in the Rose Room.

Colonel Cody, president of the league, just before his departure said, "Dave, I've been mixed up in a whole lot of affairs in my time. I've been all over the world—I've lunched with kings, wine and dined in

Buffalo Bill Cody with the Sells-Floto Circus in 1914. Pfening Archives.



almost every country, but I must say that the ball tonight is one of the neatest and most complete functions ever arranged. There has not been a thing doing all the time and all of a high class nature. The Showmen's League of America, of which I am the president, has certainly established a reputation, not only as a bulwark for indigent showmen, but it has evinced to the world at large that the tent show people are regular folks."

It was along early in my career in the show business that we showed the city of Boston for two weeks. After the close of the engagement there we made a kind of a circle of Boston, showing in all the suburban towns, some of which were quite cities in themselves, and there was one hotel at which we put up about twenty people. That made a lasting impression on my mind. It was a small wooden structure and if I remember rightly was in Salem, Massachusetts the landlord's name was John Brandt. This hotel, which probably had been built for some fifty years at that time (and that was thirty-six years ago) was, I should say, about thirty feet wide and perhaps one hundred feet long. It was two-storied, with low ceilings, and on the first floor was located a small bar room, the office, dining room and kitchen. There was me narrow stairway that led to the next floor and there was a long hall running the entire length of the building, with rooms on either side. This hall was something like four or five feet wide and in about the center was located a large wood stove which served to make the steam heat for something like twenty-five sleeping rooms. But the thing that attracted my attention was the sign over the door. It read like this: "John Brandt, Licensed Victualer," meaning that he

was licensed to serve meals. This was my first trip through the eastern country and this was the first sign of the kind I ever saw over an entrance to a hotel.

This had been out of my mind for some years, but last Wednesday night when I stepped into the Hotel Sherman in Chicago, with its beautiful ball room, the great Rose banquet hall and the Louis XVI room, and watched the sea of people moving in all directions, the contrast between this and John Brandt's hotel of Salem, which was erected some eighty years ago and the change that time had made was certainly a great one, but I think without any question the time John Brandt built his hotel in Salem the Indians were camped on the ground where the Hotel Sherman is today. But it is not the hotel business alone which has advanced so rapidly, for the difference in the shows that were traveling in the country in those days and those of today is equally great.

People attended the ball from practically every state in the union, but to me the larger part of them were new in the business. Many were kept away from the banquet and the ball for the reason that the majority of the tented show people are busy arranging for an early start on the road in the spring.

While the dancing in the main hall began at 9:30, it was 11:30 before the grand, led by Colonel Cody of Denver and Mrs. Edna Earle of Baltimore, began, and when they led off in the grand march the cheers that went up were deafening for some minutes.

Benson's orchestra of twelve pieces furnished the music, which was of the highest quality.

Telegrams of congratulation were received during the course of the evening from President Woodrow Wilson, Colonel Charles W. Parker, America's amusement king and general director of the General Amusement Company, treasurer of the league; William Judkins Hewitt, special representative of the New York *Clipper*, and others.

One of the features of the evening was the singing of ragtime by Sophie Tucker, who is known the world over as the Melba of ragtime.

Another feature was the announce-

ments made by George M. Hodge who is considered the greatest announcer in the country, and has been famous in Chicago for many years at the World's Fair and the White City and many other large entertainment. A quartet of male singers from the Majestic was also very fine and certainly deserves special mention.

An oil painting of Colonel Cody, made by one of the artists of the United States Tent and Awning company, adorned the Louis XVI room. The Cody Indian war pictures have officially been endorsed by the United States government. A special exhibition of them was given by Buffalo Bill for the President and his Cabinet, senators and congressmen, in Washington last week. The verdict was, "They are so real as to be almost uncanny."

Colonel Cody left Chicago Thursday evening for Denver, where the pictures will be put on exhibition at the Tabor Grand Opera house for the first time. Colonel Cody himself will lecture on each and every picture.

In spite of his advanced years, Colonel Cody enjoys splendid health and is as straight as an arrow. Altogether the embodiment of American manhood—eyes bright, vig-

Adam Forepaugh lithograph used in the 1880s. Pfening Archives.

orous of body, alert of mind—Buffalo Bill is a striking figure.

As George Cohan says, "Life is a funny proposition after all." Show folk have a mission to perform in this world, and the members of the S. L. A are doing their part.

March 14, 1914

Last week at the Showmen's League ball and banquet held at the Hotel Sherman, there were but five members of the League present who could be called "old timers" in the business—only that many who dated back to the seventies in the circus business.

Col. Cody was stopping at the LaSalle Hotel, but arrived at the Sherman a few minutes before nine and at that time in the evening, I was the only one "on deck," as he said, that he knew, and yet there were something like five hundred guests present in the different branches of show business. But a year from now, if there are enough of the old timers left to dance an old-fashioned quadrille they'll be lucky.

As I have been giving you more or less of a history of show people and show business for many weeks, I don't think it out of place to tell you something about yourselves, that is, of the people patronizing the circus and what circus people think of them. In my time in the ticket wagon there were hundreds of people who



would come back to the wagon, saying the rush was so great when they bought their tickets that they left fifty cents in change, or perhaps a quarter and many times a dollar. The change was always there for there and ninety-nine times out of one hundred I would know what a man wanted before he got near enough to the wagon to tell me his troubles.

But I closed my career in the ticket selling business without ever having one come back and say to me, "Mister Ticket Man, you gave me too much change." That one is to come yet. And yet the public is not to blame for this, for I do think a person would have to be a high class Christian and imbued with a world of honesty to bring back fifty cents or a dollar if he were paid that much and say to the ticket man, "I think this money belongs to you."

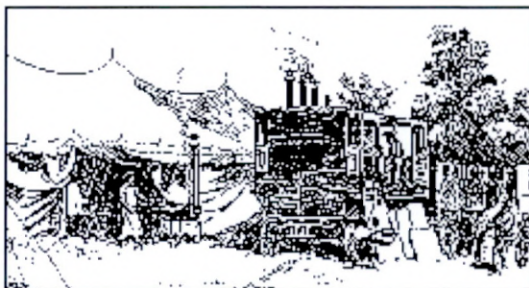
It was in the early days that circus people were to blame for this condition; for while one would be paid fifty cents or a dollar too much, there would be more than one hundred perhaps who would not get enough. And yet if one person out of ten thousand patrons of a circus got short change, this one alone would do the show a world of harm.

In my time in the Forepaugh show we showed in Janesville and a young business man took his girl to the circus in the evening and made a mistake and bought his tickets off of a speculator who was selling them for sixty cents. He had what he supposed was a silver dollar and put it in the man's hand and the man said, "These tickets are the sixty cent tickets. You can buy them at the main wagon a little later for fifty cents." He had already handed the young man his two tickets and the young man handed him the dollar, as he supposed. When the ticket seller demanded twenty cents more, he grabbed his girl and marched away, saying, "You advertised to sell at fifty cents and that is all you'll get." But the silver dollar proved to be a \$20 gold piece.

The show went from here to Oshkosh and from Oshkosh to La Crosse. And there Mr. Forepaugh received a letter from the young business man telling him of his mistake, but did not explain the exact situation. As there were only two specu-

tors selling in Janesville that night, he called them before him and showed them the letter. James Gordan, who had charge of the outside tickets said, "I got the \$20 gold piece for \$1." And then told Mr. Forepaugh the circumstances.

They charged the young man \$1.20 for his two tickets and sent him the balance of the money. The young business man seemed to think it was a joke to beat the ticket man out of twenty cents, but when he found that



he had paid \$20 for two tickets, then the shoe pinched too hard.

Yet for these things I never considered that the public was to blame, for they were always ready by the thousands to patronize a good show and always ready to pay the price. Today, with all the large shows, perhaps more than three quarters of the seats, which are the best located under the canvas, are reserved, and many of them cost as much as the admission to the show. Yet the public is willing to pay the price for the best location and as a rule these are the seats that are usually sold out first.

Fred Collier, an old Janesville boy, who is now first assistant to Rhoda Royal, who probably is the greatest horse trainer today in the world and has something over fifty head of horses now before the public, is spending the week end here with his parents and friends. Mr. Collier came up from Chicago where he had been with the Royal horses at the Hippodrome for three weeks. He returns to Chicago Sunday and Monday. They will ship the nineteen head which they have in Chicago to Denver where they will join the Sells-Floto and Buffalo Bill shows for the summer. The show will open March the 24th at Albuquerque, New Mexico which will be an early start for a tented show. Seven head of Mr. Royal's high school horses will travel with the Barnum show the coming

season, which opens in New York week after next at Madison Square Garden. He will also furnish small groups of trained horses for other shows and about thirty head will be worked by Mr. Royal and young Collier with the Sells-Floto and Buffalo Bill show this season.

An automobile circus will be put on the road this spring by B. L. Wallace and other prominent showmen. The name of the new show has not been made public but the details have been cared for and Chicago promoters are taking care of the financial end of it. According to Mr. Wallace, the entire show will be transported on motor trucks of special design to give them the genuine circus appearance. Only good sized cities will be played. The first ten weeks will be spent in the various lots in Chicago. Following Chicago, the northern part of Indiana, Illinois and Ohio will be visited. [Nothing came of this as Wallace didn't tour his truck show until 1921.]

Several years ago Hans [Honus] Wagner, the Pittsburgh ball player, attempted to launch such an enterprise, but was unfortunate in not being able to associate himself with practical showmen and was forced to give up the project. The advertising will be done by a brigade in a monster truck of unique design and electrical decorations and the show will be carried on fifteen trucks. No horses or animals will be carried and it will be purely a circus with stellar actors. The feature attraction will also smack of the motor car age, as it will be the Frenchman who lies down in the hippodrome track and allows a seven-passenger car, loaded, to be driven at full speed across his body. An air calliope, fed with air forced by the truck motor, will be used to herald to the natives that the "big top" is in the village. It is estimated that twelve trucks and two motor busses will be utilized in transporting the aggregation and the jumps will average about thirty miles.

William Corson, well known in the circus world, passed away in Canton, Ohio, Tuesday morning, March 3rd, after a short illness. He was 65 years of age and is survived by a wife and son. The deceased was born in Monroe, Wis., March 20, 1849, and

started in the show business when only sixteen years of age. Among the shows he traveled with were: Stone's Consolidated Shows, the Old John Robinson's Shows, the Barnum and the Forepaugh-Sells show. He also toured the United States and Europe with the Wilson Bros., famous acrobats, for a number of years. While playing an engagement with the Forepaugh-Sells show he had the misfortune to sprain his ankle so badly that he was forced to retire from the arena.

Three elephants, including one of the smallest baby elephants ever seen in this country, came near freezing in the eastern blizzards of March 1st. They, with a number of other animals, were in an express car on their way from New York to Shreveport, La., for the Mighty Haag Shows. They had been received from the Hagenbeck headquarters abroad and were in charge of George Moyer, general agent of the Haag Show. The car reached Memphis March 2nd, and the animals were turned out for exercise before proceeding to their destination. Mr. Moyer said the train was snowbound while passing through Pennsylvania and that he had to buy several staves from farmers to keep the animals from freezing to death. Besides the elephants, the car contained three lions, three Bengal tigers, four leopards, three zebras and fifty monkeys.

The old-time boss canvasman, Christ Bolus, is living on the "sunny side of easy street" in Canton, Ohio. Bolus, was a soldier in the second Ohio infantry during the Civil War and took part in all the principle battles with the army of the Potomac. He has been elected officer of the guard of the William McKinley Post G. A. R. of Canton, Ohio.

March 21, 1914

It was along in middle eighties that Adam Forepaugh show opened in Boston, Mass., for a two weeks' engagement. It was about the first of August and proved to be two of the hottest weeks that I ever saw in the show business. We were showing on the grounds located on what was known as the Back Bay district and everyone said that this was the hottest location in all Boston.

The show did a turn-away business

most of the time. One afternoon after I had got rid of the crowd that had hung around the wagon for almost an hour and had just settled back in a chair to catch my breath, a gentleman stepped up to the wagon and asked me some questions which I at the time thought unnecessary and have forgotten what my answers were, but they were short. With a smile on his face, he said, "I am surprised. Your face would not indicate that you were a crank, and you are not, but I can plainly see that you are overworked and nervous. I have been watching you here for nearly an hour and that is why I wanted to talk with you for a minute. I have heard about your fast ticket selling and I came a long ways to watch you sell this afternoon house with no intention of



coming to the show." And the nice talk that he gave me made me feel, as the saying goes, "like thirty cents." I am not certain but what it was then and there that the saying originated, although before I got through with my visit with the gentleman half that amount would have been a plenty for me.

He proved to be a high class businessman of the city and on two or three occasions later he called on me; and a day or two before the show left Boston, he was my guest at dinner in the cook tent which he said meant a whole lot to him for he had seen more of show people in that time than he ever had expected to.

Thursday evening I had quite a visit with Thomas Hodgeman, manager for the "Peg of My Heart" company which was to the Myers Grand. Mr. Hodgeman commenced his show career with the old Adam Forepaugh show in ninety-one as a bill poster on Car No. 1. Later on [he] joined the Ringling show where he remained five or six years in different departments and then quit the circus field and went into the hall show business. Mr. Hodgeman's home was originally in Minneapolis, but as he grew

in the business, he moved to New York City which is headquarters of most of the managers and actors of the better companies in hall show business. In conversation, Mr. Hodgeman said with the exception of a very few towns they had played to capacity business almost the entire season. The owner of the show is Oliver Morosco who has six of these shows on the road playing in different parts of the country and all doing a phenomenal business. It certainly must be a pleasure to handle such a high class attraction with the beautiful stage settings, fine wardrobe, finished artists. It is not to be wondered that they play to capacity houses.

Oliver Morosco back in the early eighties was a performer with the circus for some two or three seasons, but eventually drifted into hall show business and has since made himself independently rich. He has fourteen shows of different kinds on the road and owns three theaters in San Francisco where he made his home for some years, but later moved to New York City as that was naturally headquarters for his business. Many of the high class managers of the hall shows today got their early education with the circus.

Years ago, when Prof. W. A. Sigsbee was training ten horses for Ringling Brothers circus, Al Ringling and other horsemen of international renown told him that it was out of the question for a horse to be taught to do tricks blindfolded or to go through with pretentious stunts unless under the saddle with the whip constantly over him. In "Captain," then seven years old, which Prof. Sigsbee exhibited in the Alhambra Theater in Chicago, is living proof that it can be done. Mr. Ringling and all the others are shown to have been bad prophets. "Captain" wears a hood of leather that precludes any possibility of him seeing cues and counts, with hoofs or toes or tongue, and selects colored ribbons tied to his legs at the ward of command. His owner, who is also his trainer and exhibitor, formerly owned "Prince Trixie" which he took from coast to coast four times, and to Europe twice. He bought "Captain" four years ago in Kentucky for \$1,000. Today "Captain" is valued at

\$50,000 and his owner is not seeking a buyer. He is half brother to Sidney Dillon who has a mark of 2:16. This is "Captain's" first year out. In training Prof. Sigsbee used mental persuasion and found it worked nicely in the quiet of the home place. On the stage "Captain" is distracted slightly by the noises in the wings and in front. Later, when he becomes accustomed to theater noises, his owner hopes to make him do prodigious things.

Whenever a bunch of advance agents get together and start swapping stories, its an even money proposition that before the party breaks up, the name of H. E. Root of Laramie, Wyo, will be mentioned. H. E. Root is the manager of the opera house in the thriving western city. The manager of an opera house is not, as a general thing, a sufficiently important person for agents to waste their breath over, so it will be seen that this manager is out of the ordinary. H. E. in the first place is not "he" at all, but just what the first three letters of the name stand for a "her." Mrs. Helene E. Root, to be more explicit, is the one house manager to whom all agents take their hats off, and not merely in politeness either; but as a tribute to a remarkable little woman whose pluck, energy and intelligence have made her a success in a field rarely trodden by the gentle sex.

Mrs. Root took charge of the opera house in 1894. This does not mean that she hired a man to run things for her, but that she took entire charge of everything connected with the house. She was the boss, and the employees soon found that the "boss" was a stickler for the little details that are necessary for the successful operation of a place of amusement. Under her energetic management it was not long before the opera house which was no better or worse than the average small town opera house, began to take on the appearance of a real big city house. Many improvements were made, new seats and equipment installed, and from the old opera house made a first-class up-to-date theater. As Waiter Duggan once expressed it, "Even as the butter-fly flies from the chrysalis." This same standard has been maintained in the Laramie opera house to the present day.

When Mrs. Root took charge of the opera house, she found that she had also automatically assumed the duties of city bill poster. Along about 1898 the knights of the brush decided it would be more patriotic to go to the Spanish-American war than to stick eighth sheets on the billboards. Mrs. Root was, of course forced to hire men to fill the places of the absent warriors, but what the green men didn't know about the game filled up the boards and left no space for the billing.

Undaunted, she grabbed the long-handled brush and the paste bucket, and taking the green hands along, proceeded to do the work herself, meanwhile instructing them in the art of putting up bills and posters. This was the start of Mrs. Root's career as an active billposter, and for many years she was a conspicuous figure in the streets of Laramie, clad in clothes suitable for the occupation, either putting up bills herself or superintending the work of her men. Today her bill posting plant is complete in every detail and one that will match up with many in the larger cities.

Mrs. Root was probably the first woman to take active charge of a theater and it is certain that she was the first woman at the head of a bill posting plant and the only one that can get out and "sheet 'em up" when the occasion requires. She is the best known and best liked person in Laramie whose citizens take such pride in her business ability that she is pointed out to strangers just as sacredly as is the courthouse and the state university. In conclusion, it might be added that in her younger days Mrs., Root was a well-known newspaper woman, working for a number of years on various Chicago dailies.

March 28, 1914

In last week's *Billboard*, a theatrical and circus paper, there appeared

a picture of Sally Marks, who for many years has been a famous bareback rider.

Many of the old residents of the old residents of Janesville will remember little Sally Marks, as she was known in Janesville while the Marks family made their home here for something like three years. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs., Hiram Marks, Minnie, Willie and Sally, the three children, all being riders. Minnie, the oldest of the trio, in the middle seventies was known as the best lady rider of the time.

It was at the ring barn on the old Burr Robbins farm where Sally Marks received her first education as a bareback rider when she was something like eight or nine years old. I think it was in the spring of 1877 that she made her first appearance before an audience at the opening of the Burr Robbins show in Janesville early in May of that year.

From then on Sally Marks has been in the business continuously; and while today she is a woman of forty-six or seven years of age, she is still eagerly sought by circus managers.

Sally Marks, lady rider. Al Conover collection.



It was along in about seventy-nine or eighty that Minnie Marks married Charley Robinson of Cincinnati, the youngest son of John Robinson, whose name has been before the public for more than fifty years as a famous circus owner.

Hiram Marks, the father, was ring-master of the show, and Mrs. Marks looked after the wardrobe and her family of children, all of whom were riders. For three years the Marks family was the one big feature of the Burr Robbins show.

During their stay in Janesville, the Marks children made many friends among the young people and attended the public school here for one or two winters. But the only ones living



Joe Weber and Lew Fields. Pfening Archives.

museum that many of the side show people who traveled with the circus during the summer would find work during the winter at the Clark Street museum; and, in fact, at their houses of amusement which they managed in different parts of the country.

The famous comedians, Weber & Fields, who closed a long engagement at the Auditorium in Chicago last Sunday night, were originally in the circus business as comedians and clowns, and after the Burr Robbins show was sold to Tom Grenier, the theatrical man of Chicago, they played several weeks' engagements in the outskirts of Chicago, moving to a different location every night. In conversation with some friends last week, Lew Fields told the following: twenty-eight years ago next summer

Joe and I played such clown parts with Grenier Borthers' circus for fourteen weeks in Chicago, moving to a new lot each night. We got \$40 a week, joint, and board, but I'd like to forget the last item"

Allen Sells' ambition to become a circus manager was stifled by George Richards, a noted cannonball performer who pointed to the success of Forepaugh, Robinson and other famous circus men, and he was converted.

Ephraim was gardening in Cleveland and Peter was a reporter on the *Ohio State Journal*. A stranded circus left a few wagons in Columbus and Allen got possession

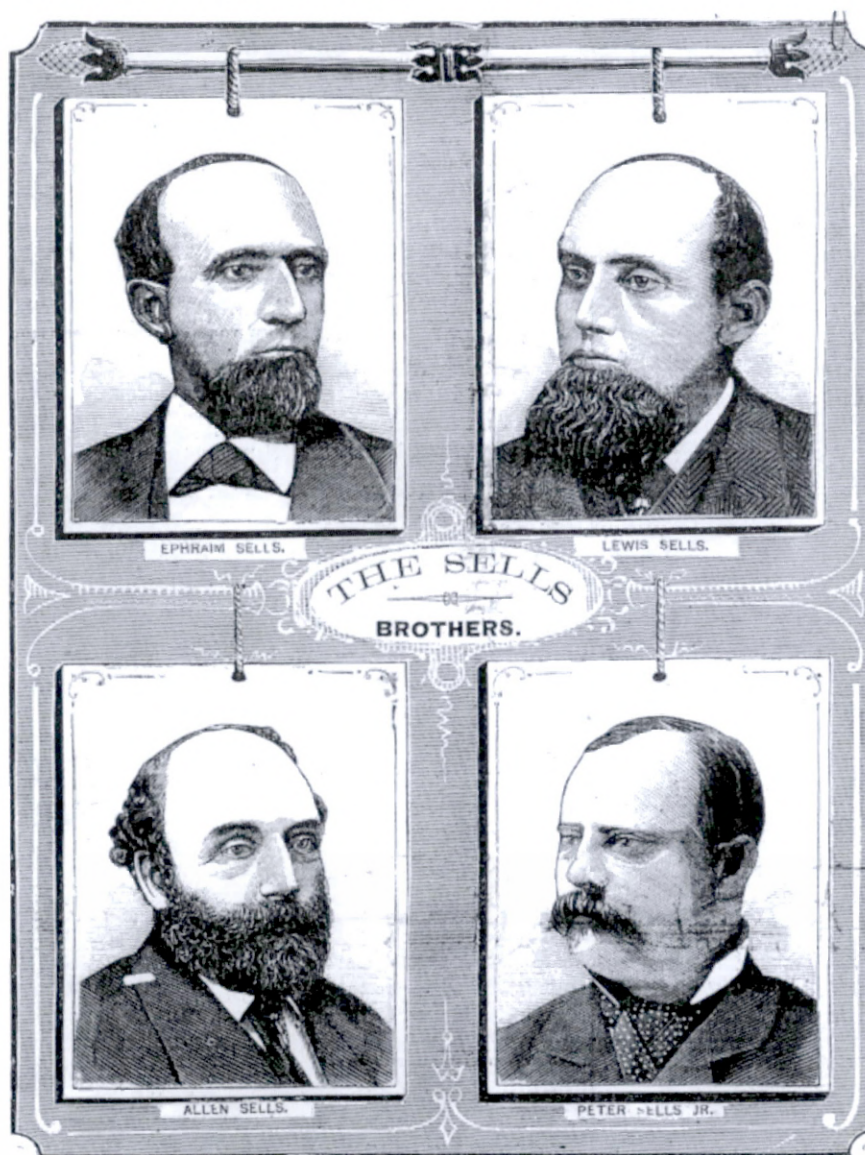
The Sells brothers of circus fame. Pfening Archives.

now are Sally and her brother Willie, both of whom are still in the business.

A few days ago I met a friend who had spent most of the winter in California. He said that he had met a friend of mine in Pasadena who knew me when I was in the show business. This man was George Middleton, who for many years made his home in Chicago and who first got his start in the show business with a circus.

It was along in the late seventies that the firm of Cole [Kohl] & Middleton opened the first dime museum in Chicago on Clark Street near Madison. Cole [Kohl] & Middleton were the pioneers in the dime museum business and it was there they laid the foundation for their great fortune in the business. Ed Cole [Kohl], Mr. Middleton's partner, died a few years ago at his beautiful summer home at Oconomowoc, and along about that time George Middleton retired from the business and settled in Pasadena, Cal. where he says he expects to pass the remainder of his days.

The firm of Cole [Kohl] & Middleton was known all over the United States. For many years their office in the dime museum building on Clark Street was made headquarters of showmen in all kinds of business. And many a broken down showman received a helping hand from Cole [Kohl] & Middleton as far back as thirty-five years ago. It was at this



of them. He talked circus by day and dreamed circus by night, but his brother Lewis could not be convinced. However, he was prevailed upon to accompany Richards and Allen to a sale which consisted of a few animals, cages, etc., and when the sale was over, he found himself the owner of a den of lions and other property.

Lewis was always pessimistic. He strenuously argued that the combined wealth of himself (which amounted to \$2,700, exclusive of his circus property) and his brother Allen's was not nearly enough to launch a circus. Richards, who desired the side show privileges in addition to performing his feats in the big show, contended they were amply able to finance the concern. He talked more strongly than ever. And thus it was that Allen and Lewis Sells launched the Silverberg shows, which afterwards became the Great European shows.

Peter Sells began his career as an advance agent of the Silverberg shows on a small salary. He continued as the agent of the show on salary until February, 1878, when an offer came to him from James A. Bailey of \$5,000 a year, which was more than double the salary he received from his brothers. It was then that Peter was given an interest in the show and it was at this time that the title of the show was changed to The Sells Bros.' Seven Elephant Show. Then the show went on rail for the first time and it was the first time the name of Sells was ever used on any advertising of the show. This was the first season a lithograph or cut of any of the Sells brothers was ever used with the show. Ephraim, Allen and Lewis, brothers of Peter, were all opposed to the use of their names or their portraits in advertising.

Rains, bad roads and a shortage of harness to move the wagons of the show contributed to its hardships the first few weeks. The proprietors, out of money, with the depression that comes to all under similar circumstances, appealed to Ephraim and he came on to the company with a few hundred dollars. The next day the

sun shone, and the first good day's business of the season came to the show. The receipts were nearly \$1,200. Ephraim hastened to Cleveland, mortgaged his garden farm for \$3,000 and returned, buying horses and other necessary equipment. He became the treasurer of the show into which had come new life and hope and held the position for many years.

April 4, 1914

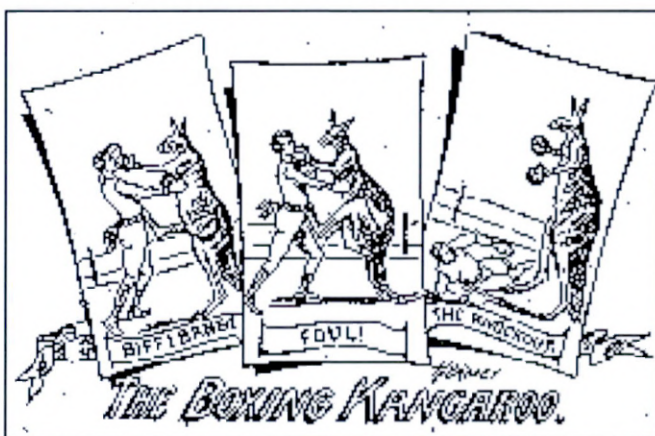
According to the custom which they have followed for some years, last week Sells-Floto-Buffalo Bill Show gave their annual dance, about a week before the opening of the show for the season at Denver. This they do after the arrival of the old

few which were noted the country over as being well up in the art of the hesitation waltz and the tango. But the hit of the evening was made by a young lady who was a new member of the company and no one knew that one of her specialties was high class dancing until she took possession of the floor and showed them a few fancy steps that brought down the house. The crowd then surrounded her on the floor and kept her dancing until the man playing the bass viol declared that his right arm was out of commission. The party lasted well into the night, and when the band played *Home, Sweet Home* it was declared by all that it was the greatest affair of its kind that they had ever attended.

Many people attending the circus often look at the wonderful riders and other performers with the show and ask the question, "How could they ever learn to do such wonderful things? Is it a gift or is it accomplished after long, hard work?"

The latter is inevitably the case. Many of the performers' families, especially those coming from European countries, have been in the business, for generations back. Millie

Turnour, the greatest balancing trapeze woman in the business, came from a family of circus people who had been in the business for many years. She was taught the business when a mere child, and when she was not more than 16 or 17 years old, she was famous all over the world and her salary was several hundred dollars per week for some years. She was with the Forepaugh Show for several years in the eighties while I was there, and although she was high class in her business and drew a large salary she was one of the nicest women to travel with that I ever knew. Only a few years ago Millie Turnour was here with the Ringling Show, doing the same graceful act in mid-air that she did when she was a girl of 17, and yet at this last visit of hers in Janesville, she had been a grandmother for several years. So it is that once in the business they seldom quit until the hardships and Father Time demand.



and new people for the coming season in order that they might become better acquainted and to give them a good time before they start on the road for the season's work.

That tickets to this party are eagerly sought by the average citizen of Denver goes without saying. Something like 400 tickets were issued to their friends in Denver. The ball was given at the Windsor Hotel in that city. The decorations were said to be as fine as money could buy. The ball opener, with the grand march, was led by Col. Cody (Buffalo Bill) and his estimable wife who came from Cody, Wyoming to attend the ball and also the opening of the great show. The circus band, which is one of the finest in the country, played several overtures. The grand march and the rest of the music was furnished by an orchestra belonging to Denver.

While there were many fine dancers on the floor, they had hired a

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Castle who created such a furor in New York, Chicago and other cities all over this country with their beautiful dancing, opened for a long engagement in London some two weeks ago, and are making equally as great a hit in that great city as they did here. So it means that the Englishmen are just as susceptible to the latest fads as are the people in this part of the country. The Castles will no doubt play long engagements in all the principle cities in Europe before their return to America; and on their return will no doubt bring a bank account with them that they will justly be proud of.

Pete Conklin, the well known singling clown. Pfening Archives.

Many of the older citizens of Janesville will remember Pete Conklin who was the singing clown of the Burr Robbins Show in seventy-eight. Pete, a short time ago, told the following story of himself and the experience that he had shortly after the war of the Rebellion:

In 1865, I traveled with John O'Brien's show. I got up a scheme which proved, a big success. We had a minstrel performer by the name of N. B. Shriner, who had but one arm. The thought struck me if I could get him to sell my song books in a soldier's uniform I could give a great war talk in my spiel on the books.

And it being just at the close of the Civil War, my spiel went big. Shriner was delighted with the proposition until I told him about putting on the uniform at which point he hesitated and said, "I was never in the army. I lost my arm in a railroad wreck, and if I was ever questioned about what regiment I belonged to, I could not answer." I posted him to say he belonged to the 19th Pennsylvania Regiment. So he got in the uniform and started in with the books. After I sang my song, I would make this announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen. I have a very fine song book containing all the new and popular songs of the day which I now offer for

sale, not for myself, but for the benefit of a poor union soldier who battled for his country. He lost his arm, and this is the only way he has to make a living. He was a brave soldier, never turned his back on the enemy, and I hope, ladies and gentlemen, you won't turn your back on him." The books went like hot cakes.

We showed in Washington, D.C. to a very select audience, General Grant, General Sherman, General Sheridan, Roscoe Conkling and James G. Blaine. I made my announcement then

stronger than ever. I said he fought for the Union and the Stars and Stripes, lost his arm at Gettysburg, and that this is the only way he had to make a living and that I hoped the ladies and gentlemen would all buy a book for the benefit of the poor soldier.

From Washington he went into the Southern country, so I had a change I put the soldier into the Confederate Army and dressed him up as a Southern soldier. He then belonged to the Washington Artillery from New Orleans. I had to change my announcement too. I told them that he was a brave soldier, fought for no bounty, no pension, fought for the lost cause, was a brave Southern soldier; never turned his back on the enemy and that I hoped the ladies and gentlemen would not turn their backs on him. The scheme worked as well in the South as in the North. At Lexington, Va., General Robert E. Lee and daughters visited the show and all bought books.

While we were showing in Washington, D. C., there was a Confederate Colonel visited the show and he also visited the show in Culpepper Court House in Virginia. He told his friends the show was fine and that it had the greatest clown who fooled 'em all. "I saw the show in

Washington, D.C.," said the Colonel, "and the clown had a one-armed man selling his song books for the Stars and Stripes and the glorious union and he hoped all would buy a book for the benefit of the poor soldier. I saw the show again in Virginia, and the same one-armed man was dressed up in the Confederate uniform, and the clown told them he had fought for no bounty, no pension, but for the lost cause and they all patronized the soldier. I tell you that clown fooled them all."

I became a little uneasy when I heard of the Colonel's remarks, so I called on him. He was glad to make my acquaintance. I had to do a little squaring. I was afraid it might queer my pitch. But he was a very affable gentleman. He said: "It's a good thing. I'll not say anything, Keep it up." On the scheme I sold 100,000 books, the largest sale ever made on circus song books.

Joe C. Miller of the 101 Ranch Wild West Shows has received from the S. D. Meyer Mfg. Co. of Sweetwater, Tex., a new \$1,000 saddle which will be used by him the coming season. This saddle for artistic workmanship and intrinsic value is without an equal in the world. The materials are the finest possible to procure. All leather is hand stamped in scroll effect and is so skillfully and artistically done that it has the soft even appearance of velvet. The fenders are finished in scroll effect with typical Texas "Long-Horn" steer head in the center. The initials, J. C. M. are stamped on the cantle. All metal parts are solid silver. The horn is of gun metal, inlaid with silver. On the crown of the horn is a diamond broach in horsehead effect in which are set 70 cut diamonds. Each of the four corners of the housing and jockeys are supported by a sterling silver wreath surrounding a five-pointed star. The points of this star are studded with diamonds, with a one-carat sapphire embedded in the wreath at the points. Each of the four earners of the skirt is supported by a similar wreath to that in housing and jockeys and of corresponding size. In the center of the wreaths in the skirts is a solid gold steer's head with diamond eyes and ruby nostrils. Surrounding the steers head are five gold stars set with rubies and dia-

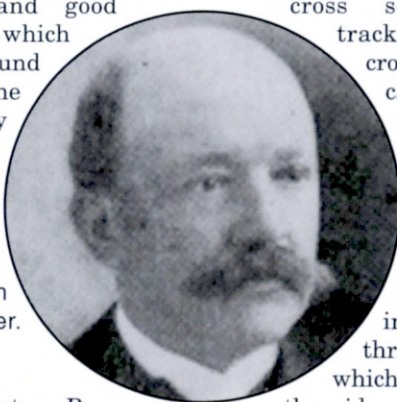


monds. The front and cantle bindings are solid silver handsomely engraved in wreath effect. The fork plate on the side of the swell is of solid sterling with the figures "101" inlaid in gold. In the center of the "0" in the "101" is a large solid gold five-pointed star, in the center of which is set a blood-red ruby, set off in bold relief by fifteen diamonds of proportionate size, gracefully arranged along the points of the star. The stirrups are covered with a silver shield with a large rosette at the center at the top where the "101" again appears in gold. The saddle was displayed at the Panhandle Stockmen's Convention at Oklahoma City Wednesday and Thursday, March 3, 4 and 5 at the Cattlemen's Convention at Fort Worth.

April 11, 1914

In the fall of 1873, when the Burr Robbins show located in Janesville there were several people with the show that made their homes in the winter wherever they happened to be. Among the number was a man by the name of Sam Dickey; and while he was billed as the principle clown of the show, he was also a good all around performer and good leaper and tumbler, which made him an all around valuable man with the show. Sam Dickey located in Janesville and it was here that he made his home for five or six years.

Benjamin Franklin Keith, theater owner. Pfening Archives.



A year or two later Burr Robbins bought what was known as the Doty farm at the foot of South Main Street, which he turned into winter quarters for his show. He built a monstrous barn for his horses, a ring barn, paint shop and an animal house. In the fall of 1875, after the close of the show, Sam Dickey conceived the idea of building a small island in the center of a lake which was near the animal house to the north.

Dickey took his shovel and wheelbarrow and went to work. After two or three weeks of hard work, he had

completed a small island in the center of this lake, where he planted half a dozen small trees, covered the earth with small stones and gravel, and erected a flag pole in the center. In a few days there was a white flag with flaming red letters which read "Dickey's Island." But Dickey's island was not of long duration. A year or two later, when the floods came in the spring, Dickey's island was swept away. But for something like two years the small island erected by Sam Dickey was something of a novelty in winter quarters.

It was along in the summer of 1880 that we were showing in Jacksonville, Ill., and during the evening performance the toughs of the city got troublesome around the dressing room. After they had cut several holes in the canvas, Dickey made up his mind it was time he should go out and drive them away. Dickey was a powerful man and knew no fear. It was not long before the city toughs were badly done up by Dickey, who in a few minutes returned to the ring and went to work. After the show was out in the evening, Dickey and myself were returning to the hotel. We had to

cross several railroad tracks which were crowded with freight cars close up to the road way. Between these freight cars the toughs had secreted themselves. As Dickey and I were passing, one of them threw a heavy stone which struck Dickey on the side of the head. This

laid him out and the toughs made good their escape. After a time I got some help and we took Sam to the hotel. This injury proved later to be his undoing. While he was only laid up for a few days, every one around the show could plainly see that Sam was not himself and while he finished the season, this proved to be his last year with any show.

It was along in the winter that his sickness proved to be consumption. Early in the summer Sam Dickey died in a hospital at Chicago. While Dickey was rough in a way, he was a

giant in strength and one of the best hearted men and as good a friend as I ever knew. Many of the older citizens of Janesville remember Sam Dickey's little island.

March 26 at the Breakers Hotel, Palm Beach, Florida, occurred the death of Benjamin Keith, "the father of continuous vaudeville," and while I am under obligations to the New York *Clipper* for the notice of his career in the business for many years back, I will tell you something about Keith's first career in show business. Mr. Keith's first career in this business was in George Bunnell's Museum in New York City, and this was before he was out of his teens. He remained with Mr. Bunnell for a year or two and later went to the Barnum show, where he remained for a year. In 1881 he joined the Adam Forepaugh show at Washington, D.C. on April 26. It was here that I first met him and we soon became warm friends. Mr. Keith had a private in his side show as an assistant, Edward Albee, which by the way, was the favorite of Mr. Keith's employees from that time until his death last month.

Mr. Keith's privilege with the show in 1881 made him some money, and soon after joining it he got a large express envelope and asked me if I would not be his banker for the season. He said, "I want to have my money with the show where I can use it if necessary. I will only bother you once or twice a week at the most; and when the season closes I will have my money with me wherever I see fit to go."

Although Mr. Keith had been in business for ten years before and had branched out several times in a small way for himself, up to this time he never had made any money. When closing the season that year at Chattanooga, Tenn., Benjamin Franklin Keith and Eddie Albee, who had been his faithful helper during the summer, took their express envelopes, which contained several hundred dollars, and left for Boston, Mass. It was along some time in February that Keith leased a store room or a part of one and started in the museum business in a very small scale. It was not so very many years later that he commenced to make history in vaudeville and hall show

business. And long before his death his name was a household word, as you might say, the world over. People who were close to Mr. Keith say that at his death he left many millions. The foundation for his great fortune was laid in 1881 with the Forepaugh show and the express envelope in the ticket wagon was his first bank

His real career as a showman began in 1883 when, in company with William Austin, he opened a popular price show in a hall in Boston.

"My only attraction," said Mr. Keith was Baby Alice, a midget that at the age of three months weighed but one and one-half pounds, but I installed a small stage in the rear of our room and secured several acts from the variety theaters, with the understanding that all vulgar or suggestive language was to be cut out of every act."

Soon an upstairs room was added. From time to time as the business increased, additional space was secured until finally he could seat four hundred persons in the lower auditorium while the room above was used for the exhibition of curiosities. It is worthy of note that during this early period and in the limited space then available, he succeeded in introducing to delighted audiences many of the foremost vaudeville artists of the day. Mrs. Tom Thumb held her daily levees in these contracted quarters for a series of weeks. It was in this hall that Fred Kyle, famous for his unique dog, cat, baby and bird shows in Horticultural Hall, duplicated his success while connected with Mr. Keith for the period of about one year, adding to them a beauty show which was the most successful of all. In May, 1884, Mr. Keith was joined by George H. Batcheller of Providence, R. I., having previously purchased the business of a Mr. Gardiner with whom he had been associated for about thirteen months. He now realized that some radical departure from existing methods must be made if any marked financial success was to be achieved.

He believed that if a performance was begun at a stated hour and was continued without intermission through the day and evening there

would be no waiting by patrons, but each person would be sure of finding something interesting going on upon the stage. His idea resulted in the continuous performance entertainment which was inaugurated on July 6, 1883, and marked a new era in the amusement world. It proved an immediate success and his theater became so popular that before long he was obliged to secure the Bijou theater, adjoining. Mr. Batcheller withdrew and thereafter Keith was the sole proprietor of the Gaiety and Bijou, as the combined house was called.

With the courage and enterprise that were characteristic of the man Keith began to establish similar entertainments in other cities. In Providence he opened the Gaiety Museum in 1887; in Philadelphia the Bijou theater in 1889, and in New York the Union Square theater in 1893. At the present time Keith's theaters are to be found in all of the principal cities in the east and middle west, the most important of them being Keith's and the Bijou, Boston; Keith's Allegheny, Philadelphia; Keith's theater Washington; Keith's Palace, Harlem Opera House, Union Square, Colonial, Crescent, Gotham, Alhambra, Bronx, Greenpoint, Orpheum, Bushwick, Prospect and Madison, New York; Keith's theaters in Portland, Lowell, Lynn, Manchester, Columbus, Toledo, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Louisville, Jersey City and the Hippodrome, and Keith's Cleveland.

In 1906 the United Booking Offices was incorporated with Mr. Keith as president to control and manage his numerous theaters. It is probably the greatest consolidation of money and power in the entertainment world and ranks with the most important of America's industrial combinations. Its weekly payroll exceeds \$500,000. The star players who have appeared in the Keith theaters include Sarah Bernhardt, Mrs. Langtry, Neil Burgess, Lew Dockstader, Nat

Goodwin, Yvette Guilbert, Julian Eltinge, Olga Nethersole, Weber and Fields, Ethel Barrymore, Eddie Foy, David Bispham, Marie Tempest, Bessie Abbott, Robert Mantell, David Warfield, Joseph Jefferson, Isadora Duncan, Eva Tangway, Cecilia Loftus and Carmencita.

E. F. Albee, for many years Mr. Keith's manager in all his various enterprises, became associated with him in the winter of 1883, and from the first was a devoted adherent of Keith's manager in all his various enterprises, took up the study of theater construction. When Mr. Keith decided to build finest theater in America for the home of Keith vaudeville, Mr. Albee was placed in full

charge when Keith's Boston theater was opened in 1894, it created a sensation and is still looked upon as a model playhouse.

Edward F. Albee, an associate of B. F. Keith. Pfening Archives.



B. F. Keith attained the position of dean of American vaudeville. The master brain and

master hand to conceive and execute the innumerable details of this vast superstructure of vaudeville were inspired by a character involving courage, determination, perseverance and an inflexible purpose never to accept failure. Much of his success was due to his conscientiousness in the selection of refined entertainment. Under his fostering care and original methods the once despised vaudeville rose to a high rank in the estimation of the best class of theatergoers. Mr. Keith's influence was felt in the profession not only throughout the United States, but in Europe as well.

Mr. Keith was twice married, first in 1873 to Mary Catherine, daughter of Charles Branley of Providence, R. I. She died in 1910 leaving one son, Andrew Paul Keith, who for several years past was associated with his father in the theatrical business. B. F. Keith was married again Oct. 29, 1913 to Ethel Bird, daughter of Plynton B. Chase of Akron, O., and Washington, D. C.

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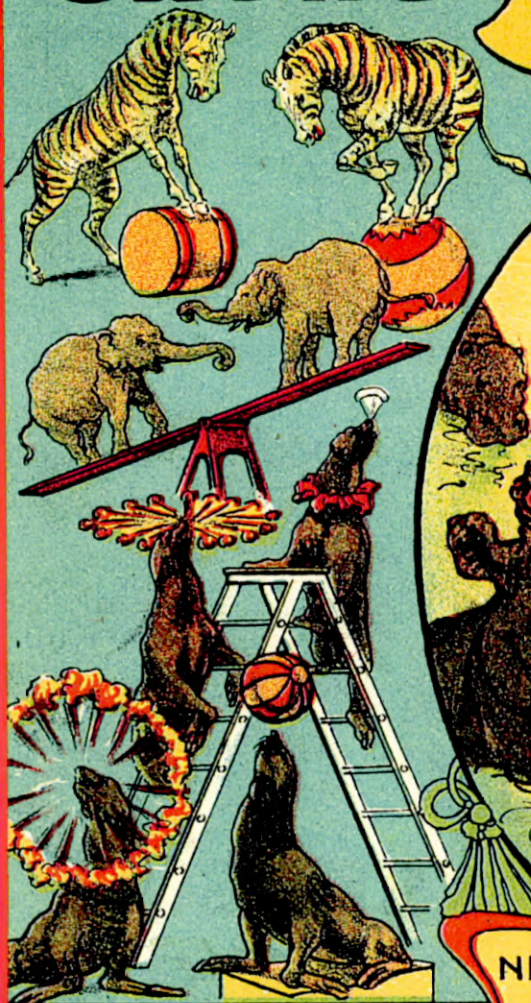
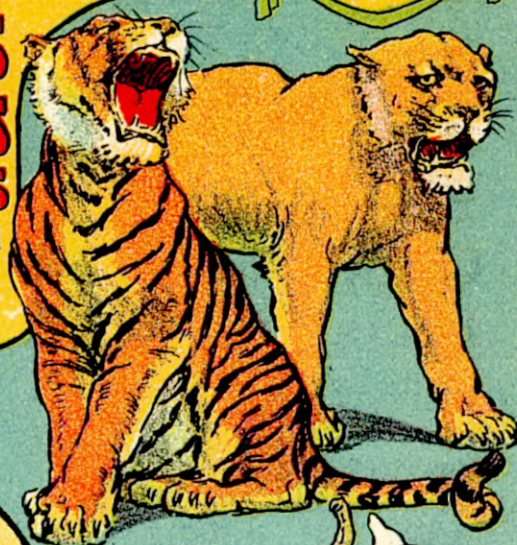
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